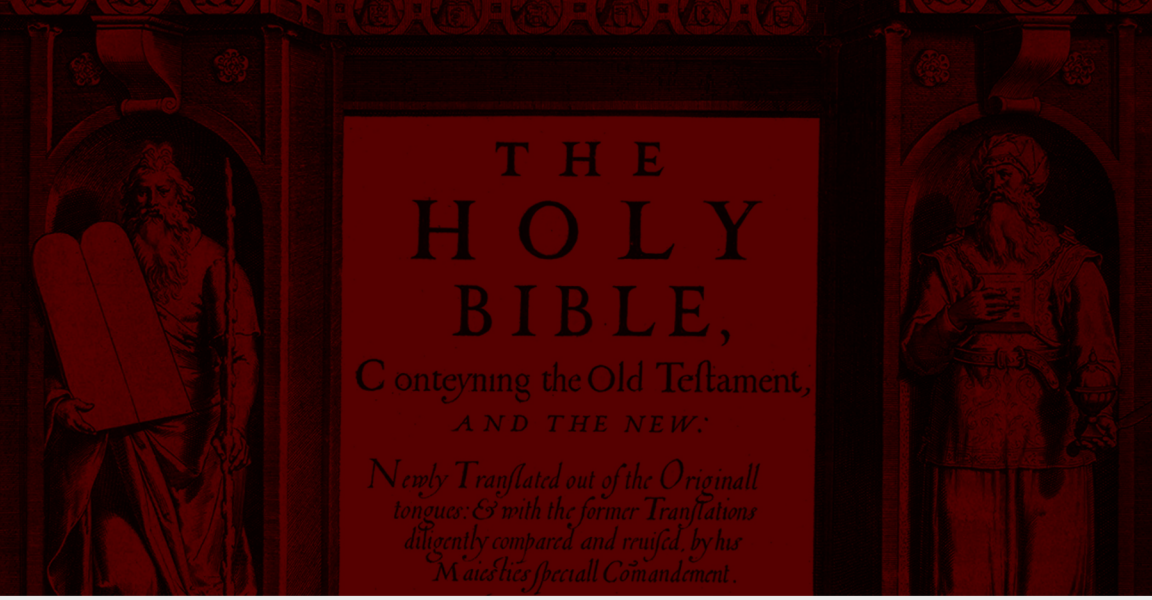


God Spoke

The Story of How We Came to Have the Bible as We Know It Today



Matthew J. D. Mangum

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2025, Matthew J. D. Mangum

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Back cover image: Codex Vaticanus

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Dedicated to the congregations at Crossroads Fellowship Church and Redemption Fellowship. May you grow in your confidence in and love for the Word of God.

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Abbreviations

ASV	American Standard Version
AV	Authorised Version
BSB	Berean Standard Bible
CSB	Christian Standard Bible
DSS	Dead Sea Scrolls
ESV	English Standard Version
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible
KJV	King James Version
LB	The Living Bible
LSB	Legacy Standard Bible
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NA	Nestle-Aland
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NET	New English Translation
NIV	New International Version
NIVi	NIV Inclusive Language Edition
NKJV	New King James Version
NLT	New Living Translation
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NWT	New World Translation
RSV	Revised Standard Version
RV	Revised Version
SP	Samaritan Pentateuch
TNIV	Today's New International Version
TPT	The Passion Translation
TR	Textus Receptus
UBS	United Bible Societies

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I did not entirely intend to write this book. It began as my way of putting together a comprehensive list of notes for a class I have taught on how we came to have the Bible, and it really just kept on going from there. Those who have taken my class have shaped my approach to this book to some extent

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Concerning the Freely Given Nature of This Book

Because I do not expect all of my readers to read the copyright page, I have chosen to include a section here to highlight the freely shareable nature of this book. I have dedicated this book to the public domain, meaning that you can freely copy, translate, modify, and distribute this book without restriction and without needing to ask for my permission. This is a resource freely given for the use and edification of the body of Christ. You may visit equipthesaints.church to find a freely available digital copy of the book, freely available audiobook, audiobook supplemental material, as well as (Lord willing) other books and resources I hope to make available in the future. Physical copies of this book will be sold at cost (not for profit) to keep the sale price as low as possible.

We live at a time in our culture when we are inundated with a plethora of Christian resources, yet very few of them are freely available and shareable. Most resources, including English Bible translations, are locked behind copyrights which prevent their free use and distribution, including to other countries where our brothers and sisters do not have access to the wealth of resources that we possess.[1] Yet Christ freely gave to us; should we not also freely give? The sale of ministry has become, in my estimation, far too unquestioningly accepted in our time and is, I believe, in need of reform. In our digital age, it is easier than ever to cheaply and widely distribute resources for the edification of the body. Keeping

[1] For a deeper dive into how our culture's restrictiveness hurts global Christians, see Tim Jore, *The Christian Commons: Ending the Spiritual Famine of the Global Church*, 2nd ed. (Tim Jore, 2015). Freely available online at www.unfoldingword.org/publications/the-christian-commons.

these tools behind paywalls, copyright restrictions, or even "free book" offers that require a transaction of handing over personal information seems to be at odds with the generosity God has shown toward us; freely we have received, so freely we should give. I have become convinced of the argument that ministry should be supported and not sold, and so I offer this book freely in service of Christ's church. I would urge you to consider the case for freely giving found in Conley Owens' book *The Dorean Principle*,[2] as well as online at sellingjesus.org and copy.church. Whether or not you agree with the conclusions in whole, I believe you will be challenged to rethink the current paradigm.

[2] Conley Owens, *The Dorean Principle: A Biblical Response to the Commercialization of Christianity* (Dublin, CA: FirstLove Publications, 2021). Freely available online at https://thedoreanprinciple.org/

Preface

This book arose out of my desire for believers to become better acquainted with the historical process by which the English Bible they hold in their hands (or read on their devices!) came to be. I believe this is necessary because the average evangelical Protestant tends to be uninformed, or even misinformed, about the Bible's history. And that is no slight upon the average person; knowledge of church history is not a strong suit of American evangelicalism as a whole, and so that simply trickles down to the everyday churchgoer. Unfortunately, the main place where believers are exposed to little factoids about how we got the Bible—the internet—is chock full of poor or simply untrue information. I have found that it is often well-meaning but misinformed Christians who probably do more to undercut other believers' faith in the Scriptures and mislead them about the historical role of the Bible in Christianity. Usually, this comes from people who simply don't know any better. Have you ever come across a meme or image on social media about the corruption of modern Bible translations? Usually, a meme of this sort would come along with warnings about translations such as the NIV and ESV and all of the verses, such as Matthew 18:11, that have been removed from them. It will often speak of a conspiracy on the part of godless publishers who are seeking to change the Word of God and will urge you to hang on to your physical copies since they at least can't be changed. The issue is that messages like this are true, technically speaking, but they completely lack context and are sensationalistic, misrepresenting what actually accounts for the differences between Bible translations. Sensationalistic information about the Bible serves to undermine the faith

in the Scriptures of those who use modern Bible translations. I have no doubt that such memes and images are shared with the well-meaning intention to guard the truth of Scripture, but they instead end up spreading misinformation and so cause others to mistrust the reliability of their Bibles.

While the good intentions of the ill-informed are probably most common, sometimes the information comes from Christians with large followings who really should know better. Andy Stanley is the most prominent example in recent memory in my estimation. In his book *Irresistible*,[1] he writes:

> Preachers, teachers, and evangelists are far . . . as in far, far . . . more likely to assert "The Bible teaches!" "The Word of God tells us," "The Scripture says," rather than "The apostle Paul wrote," or "Jesus said." Christians are generally quick to leverage the authority of the Bible. We are not as quick to leverage the authority of the authors of the New Testament or, strangely enough, Jesus himself. This is unfortunate. This approach has undermined and continues to undermine the credibility of our faith. Why? Because supporting our faith with "The Bible says" communicates the foundation of our faith is the Bible. As we've discovered, it's not. Not unless there weren't any Christians until after the Bible was assembled in the fourth century. "The Bible says" insinuates that the roots of our faith go no deeper than the fourth-century decision to combine first-century documents with the Jewish Scriptures. We would do our generation a great service if we would leverage the actual source of our authority rather than the fourth-century title someone gave to our collection of sacred manuscripts.[2]

Stanley then goes on to say,

> Clearly, the individually inspired documents—Matthew, Luke, Romans, for example—predated the collection and publication of these individually inspired documents. Eventually, church leaders recognized these particular documents as authoritative and included them in our New Testament along with a version of the Jewish Scriptures. It was a fourth-century church leader, Athanasius of Alexandria, who was first to compile the list of documents that would eventually be recognized and sanctioned by the church as the official New Testament. The list first appears in a letter dated . . . don't rush by the date . . . AD 336. Leading up to the drafting of this important letter, and for decades following this letter, church leaders debated, as Bob Seger famously said, "What to leave in and what to leave out."[3]

The history that Stanley presents is woefully lacking. To hear him tell the story, Christians had no Bible before the fourth century, and it was only in the fourth

century that the books of the New Testament were finally compiled. (He also gets his date wrong for Athanasius; the letter is from 367, not 336). The reality is that Christians did have a Bible—though all the books may not have been compiled into a single volume and the edges of the canon were still a little fuzzy—and the Bible really did function as the foundation of the faith since a core of authoritative books was known very early. In the words of the late second-century bishop Irenaeus, "We have learned from none others the plan of our salvation, than from those through whom the Gospel has come down to us, which they did at one time proclaim in public, and, at a later period, by the will of God, *handed down to us in the Scriptures, to be the ground and pillar of our faith*."[4] Stanley has presented in his teachings and in his writings a picture of the Bible that is inaccurate, and so downplays the function of Scripture in the church and gives all those who have listened to him or read his book a wrong impression about the history of our Bible.

At other times, Christians can tend to overstate how the Bible came to be. Sometimes Christians will say the Dead Sea Scrolls show that the Old Testament was perfectly copied for over a thousand years; though the scrolls do show how faithfully the Old Testament was copied, they also show some large differences and the presence of textual diversity. Other times, you may hear statements about the core of the New Testament canon being fixed by the end of the first century or early second century (which is certainly possible), but our surviving sources cannot prove such an early date. Or you may hear that there are over 24,000 surviving manuscripts of the New Testament, and this helps prove its reliability; there are over 24,000 only if we count all of the ancient translations (there are over 5,000 Greek manuscripts), and that number needs to be nuanced. Furthermore, good manuscript attestation only confirms *what* someone wrote, not that what they wrote is *true*.[5] As often as poor information circulates, overstatement on the part of Christians is perhaps more harmful. If someone has been defending their confidence in the Bible based upon overstatements, the impact may be quite damaging when they come to realize that the facts cannot actually support their view. This is not to say that I am seeking to diminish the faith that believers have in their Bibles, but I want the reasons they say they know they have the right Bible to be reasons that are based in fact, not in wishful thinking or unsupportable arguments.

All of this is not even to speak of the poor information and sensationalism that comes from the unbelieving world. You might hear things about the Bible being copies of copies of copies and being so hopelessly corrupted that we can never know what the Bible actually said. You might hear that the books of the Bible were chosen by a bunch of powerful bishops who suppressed all competing books. You might hear that there are many "lost books" of the Bible that have been rediscovered that should make us rethink what Christianity is all about. If you go

looking for information about how we have the Bible, the odds are that you will find sensationalistic information that is just wrong or lacks context.

If you do not know where to look or how to evaluate the information that you are hearing, you may have a difficult time accessing reliable information about how the Bible came to be. My intent is to be a guide to finding what is reliable information and to give you the tools to recognize sensationalism, overstatement, or plain untruths. It is also my intent that by the time you finish this book, you will walk away with ever more confidence in the Bible that you have: that you have the right books, with the right words, and with those words translated correctly so that you truly have access to the Word of God.

I have written this book with two audiences in mind. First, I have written this for the person who has little to no exposure to any of the major topics that will be covered. Second, I have written this for the person who may have exposure and is looking to dive deeper. This twofold audience has shaped my approach and formatting of the book. While I personally prefer the use of footnotes, I have chosen to use endnotes to declutter the text for a reader who has little interest in all of the documented support. Yet the notes are there for someone who wants to dig further. It is my goal that this may serve as a reference book for those who are seeking further study, so I have provided a reasonably large number of references to primary sources and relevant secondary sources, in addition to recommended further reading at the end of each chapter and appendices to serve as further reference points (if you are not familiar with church history, I would especially point you to Appendix A for a glossary of figures from church history). Where I cite from older translations of works, I have slightly modified the quotes to modernize the verbs (no -eth endings) and pronouns (replacing "thees" and "thous"). In my approach throughout the book, I have striven to be pastoral and sensitive to where some statements or facts may be troubling and to offer perspective or responses to various challenges. I do not intend for these responses to be the final word, but I hope that having some pastoral sensitivity might be helpful to you in your journey.

As a side note, I should make clear that this book is not an apologetic for the trustworthiness and truthfulness of Scripture. While matters of canon and textual transmission are certainly related to trustworthiness, my concern here is not to defend the truth of what Scripture contains. Throughout the book, I assume God's word is true and trustworthy and I will not devote space to proving why that is so. Others have written very adequate books on the subject, and I will direct you to them.[6] My main concern is to teach how you came to have the Bible you hold in your hands and to clear away any problems that might make you question whether you have the right books, the right words, or the right translation.

I have structured the book into four sections: Part 1: The Authorship of Scripture; Part 2: The Canon of Scripture; Part 3: The Transmission of Scripture; and Part 4: The Translation of Scripture. In Part 1, we will be considering questions regarding authorship and the composition of Scripture. We will also look at where authorship is and is not important in the history of the Bible. In Part 2, we will examine the canon of Scripture. The main question that this section will seek to answer is why we have the books we have in our Bibles. I have devoted the most attention to this portion of the book because I find this topic to have the most nuance needed and to be the broadest in scope. In Part 3, we will look at how the Bible was copied and transmitted down through the ages. This is easily the most technical part of the book. I have attempted to give a good idea of what has gone into the copying of Scripture, and there is much more that could be said, but I have tried to keep it accessible without going too much into the weeds. In Part 4, we will look at both the process and history of English Bible translation. Because most Americans are monolingual, they do not often have a firsthand frame of reference for the process of translation. My goal is to give you a glimpse into how translation is done, to give you an appreciation for the intricacies and difficulties that come with it, while also giving you confidence that you possess the Word of God in an intelligible form in English. We will close by looking at the history of the Bible in English, bringing our story down to the present.

As we begin this journey, my prayer for you is that you will be equipped to better know how we have come to have the Bible. As you come to better know how we have come to have the Bible, I hope that you will grow in confidence in and love for the Word of God.

Part 1: The Authorship of Scripture

1.
The Words of God and of Men

This book is primarily concerned with the historical process of how we got the Bible. This is well and good and necessary, particularly when so many false narratives about how the Bible came to be fly about in the popular imagination, yet to focus only on the historical formation would be to miss the most basic reason we have the Bible: God spoke. God chose to reveal himself to us through words in human language, and he chose the written word to be the most enduring form. We have the Bible because God spoke in many times and many places and his words were written down by authorized agents who were commissioned to deliver a message that was not their own. When we speak about the authors of the Bible, we very often speak of the human authors. But if we are to speak of the Bible as the Word of God, how does that relate to human authorship? What does it mean that the Bible is the Word of God written down by men? Before we dig into the question of human authorship, we will take some time to reflect upon the divine authorship of Scripture, as well as why Scripture is even necessary in the first place.

The Need for Revelation

Have you ever thought about how it is that we can know something about another person? How do you know that your brother, father, daughter, or aunt likes or dislikes something? How do you know how they think politically? How do you know what they fear or what they love? The answer to all of these questions, in a

very real sense, is revelation. Allow me to demonstrate with an example from my own life. My favorite flavor of ice cream is mint chocolate chip. This is something that is true about me that some of you may or may not know. Now there are two basic ways you can know this about me. First, you could observe that when I have ice cream, more often than not, I will choose mint chocolate chip, and you can reasonably infer that that is probably my favorite flavor. You would probably not be certain that it is my favorite, but your observation would lead you to a conclusion that is most likely correct. The second way you could know this about me is if I tell you, as I just did. I am making a self-disclosure about myself that you now know for sure. You are not making an educated guess, but are taking my word for it that this is true about me and my ice cream preferences. Now let us take the thought one step further. Suppose somebody else told you that my favorite ice cream flavor was mint chocolate chip, could you truly know that about me? Yes, you could, but only if that other person's information was based upon my own self-revelation, whether through their observation of my actions or through my self-disclosure. Ultimately, I myself am the source of this revelation about my favorite flavor of ice cream. If somebody were to come up to you and tell you that my favorite flavor was mocha, well such an assertion is just flat wrong (I am no fan of mocha at all) and it is not derived from the most authoritative source about my favorite ice cream flavor: myself. My own self-revelation is necessary for you to know this about me, whether by demonstrating it through my actions or by telling you about it. If I so choose, I could withhold this information. I could choose to never again have ice cream and could choose to never tell anyone what my favorite flavor of ice cream is. The fact that mint chocolate chip is my favorite flavor would still be true, but it could never be known beyond my own mind without some form of revelation.

If it is true that knowledge about other persons is based upon their own revelation of themselves, then this is even more true of God himself. How could we know about God, who is so much higher above us, unless he revealed himself to us? As C. S. Lewis so artfully put it, "If Shakespeare and Hamlet could ever meet, it must be Shakespeare's doing. Hamlet could initiate nothing."[1] As mere created beings, we cannot initiate contact with God; it is the Creator who must reach out to us and show himself to us. This is the great *why* of the need for revelation and leads us to a discussion of the two ways in which God reveals himself to us: general revelation and special revelation.

General revelation pertains to our knowledge of God as discerned through observing his actions in the world around us and is probably best understood as what we may learn about God through creation. We call this type of revelation *general revelation* because it is generally revealed to all peoples in all places at all

times. As Paul put it, "For what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood from His workmanship, so that men are without excuse" (Rom. 1:19–20). This revelation is such that men are without excuse as to this basic knowledge about God. The creation itself tells us of God's wise and powerful nature in how he has ordered it; as the psalmist says, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands" (Ps. 19:1). God has revealed himself to us in his actions in creating the world. Just as you could make reasonable inferences from observing my choice of ice cream, so much more can we come to reasonable conclusions about God through an observation of creation. Yet general revelation is also limited: it is clear enough to provide us with a general knowledge of God's existence and power such that mankind is without excuse, yet it does not tell us many specific details about God. It does not tell us, for example, what sort of God he is, nor his plan of salvation, nor his character. Our knowledge of God through general revelation alone is incomplete; the picture is dim and we can very easily wrongly interpret this revelation or even intentionally distort it. Yet God did not leave us with a dim picture of himself, but he chose to reveal himself specifically through his special revelation. This is why special revelation is absolutely necessary, for what can be discerned about God is more clearly and directly revealed by it.

The term *special revelation* is used to refer to the various ways in which God has spoken: in a direct voice from heaven, in dreams, through prophets, or through the written word. Each of these is a form of special revelation, as they are revealed at specific places and times to specific people. Just as me telling you my favorite flavor of ice cream is clearer, so much clearer is God's special revelation of himself, of his character, of his attributes, and of his plan for salvation. The greatest form of special revelation that we recognize is God's self-disclosure through the person of his Son, Jesus Christ: "On many past occasions and in many different ways, God spoke to our fathers through the prophets. But in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, and through whom He made the universe" (Heb. 1:1–2). Jesus came into the world and took on flesh, and was a living and breathing special revelation of God. He came and revealed himself not to "condemn the world, but to save the world through Him" (John 3:17). Now while God has used various means of delivering his special revelation, the most enduring means that God has intended as normative down through the generations has been the written word of his revelation, in what we call *the Bible* or *the Scriptures,* which has been given to us through the medium of men who were guided by the Holy Spirit.

Men as God's Authorized Agents

We speak of the Bible as the Word of God, yet we also speak about it as the words of men.[2] We speak of Moses writing books, of Paul saying this, and of John saying that. How is it that we simultaneously say two things about the nature of the Bible? To understand how we speak of the Bible as both the words of God and the words of men, we need to think of the men who wrote the words as authorized agents, that is, people who are commissioned to speak or act on behalf of someone else. We could think of a parent sending a child to issue a command to her brother; the brother obeys not because the sister has spoken, but because the sister was commissioned to speak on behalf of the parent with the parent's authority. In that sense, she functions as an authorized agent. Throughout Scripture, God's words are primarily delivered and written by authorized agents, most notably the prophets and apostles, who were each divinely commissioned to speak for God and to deliver God's words. These men "spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21) and their words were so intertwined with God's own words that Paul could say, "All Scripture is God-breathed" (2 Tim. 3:16). The author of Hebrews can even quote Psalm 94 by simply introducing his quotation with the statement, "the Holy Spirit says" (Heb. 3:7). The Scripture is filled with the assumption that men act as God's authorized agents: Moses records the Law as God commanded him, Jeremiah is told by the Lord, "I have put My words in your mouth" (Jer. 1:9), and the prophets explicitly declare, "thus says the Lord," delivering their message through human language. The apostles were commissioned by Christ to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you" (Matt 28:19–20). They were promised the help of the Holy Spirit, who "will guide you into all truth. For He will not speak on His own, but He will speak what He hears, and He will declare to you what is to come" (John 16:13). The messengers are human, but the source is divine. In his high priestly prayer, Christ prays for those who will believe in him through the apostles' message (John 17:20). Commenting on the implications of Christ's prayer, Timothy Ward notes,

> For the words God the Father gave to God the Son have been given by the Son, in ordinary human language, to his disciples. Therefore everyone who never met the Word incarnate directly, but who hears the words of Christ from the disciples, nevertheless encounters the words of the Father and of Christ, who in those words present themselves to us as the covenant-making God.[3]

We no longer have prophets declaring to us "thus says the Lord," but we have the Word of God that has been delivered through various means, written down, and preserved to be the ground and pillar of our faith. The Scriptures are God's special revelation to us; they are the means by which we come to know God and his character, of his moral law, and of his plan of salvation through Jesus Christ. We know of God through general revelation, but we truly come to *know* God through his special revelation which he has given to us.

Conclusion: God Spoke

So why do we need revelation? Because without it, we would have no knowledge of God. Just as you would have no knowledge about my ice cream preferences without revelation through my actions or through my words, so too would we have no knowledge of God unless he chose to reveal himself to us through his general and special revelation. Knowledge of God can only come through God's own self-disclosure; if supposed knowledge of God is based upon anything but the source, it is illegitimate and without any firm foundation. If someone tells you, "I believe God is like X" or "God would never do Y," yet this statement is not rooted in God's revelation about himself, it cannot be given any credence. This would be akin to someone telling you that my favorite flavor of ice cream is really mocha, despite my own actions and statements indicating that my favorite flavor is mint chocolate chip. The assertion is divorced from the only real authority that could give it legitimacy.

In a book that is primarily concerned with the historical question of how we got the Bible, we should not lose sight of the ultimate reason for why we have the Bible: God spoke. Why do we need the Bible? We need it to know God, for it is his revelation of himself. In his kindness and according to his good pleasure, he spoke and revealed himself to us so that we may know him and love him. He chose to reveal himself in creation, and he chose especially to reveal himself clearly through the words of human language preserved in the Bible. Throughout this book, we will be considering the historical processes by which the Bible was written, collected into canonical form, transmitted in written manuscripts down through the centuries, and translated into English so that we can read it in our own language today. This historical process may seem to be the answer to the question of how we got the Bible, but to focus on only those aspects would be to miss that God's speech and his decision to reveal himself is the foundational reason for why we have the Bible. The Bible can be both the Word of God and the words of men because it is God's speech transmitted by his authorized agents through historical means. The historical process is important and can be complicated, but unless we root our ultimate answer in the fact that God spoke, then the

knowledge of how we got the Bible is simply an intellectual exercise exploring interesting facts that have no bearing on life. God has spoken, and he has given us his special revelation in the Bible through historical means that can be known and appreciated.

Further Reading

Ward, Timothy. Words of Life: *Scripture as the Living and Active Word of God.* Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009.

2.
The Authors of the Old Testament

When we come to the question of the authorship of the Old Testament, there are many respects in which we are asking a question that we cannot answer. The earliest surviving manuscripts we have of the Old Testament are several hundreds of years removed from the time of composition, meaning we do not know what the earliest form of the text looked like. In the intervening period between when the texts were composed and the earliest manuscripts, we see evidence of editors who have had a hand in shaping the books into the form we know them today. Some books, such as Psalms, Proverbs, or 1–2 Kings, are books that incorporate and arrange older texts and their edited nature is quite clear to see. Others are more open to speculation. Complicating matters further regarding authorship is the fact that many books have no author mentioned, while in others, the traditional author is not attested clearly in the text itself. As we shall see, when we speak about the authors of the Old Testament, it is probably just as fair to speak of the editors of the Old Testament as it is to speak of the authors.

The Torah

The first five books of the Old Testament, known as either the Torah (meaning "Law") according to the Hebrew rendering or the Pentateuch (meaning "Five Scrolls") in Christian parlance, have traditionally been attributed to Moses. We see this attribution assumed, at least for parts of the Torah, in the Torah itself: Moses writes down what the Lord tells him and takes up the Book of the Covenant

(Ex. 24:4, 7), he writes down the Ten Commandments (Ex. 24:27-28), records the happenings of the people (Num. 33:2), and writes down the book of the Law (Deut. 31:24). Outside of the Torah, we find numerous references to the Law (or Book) of Moses throughout other parts of the Old Testament.[1] Later Jewish tradition concerning the Old Testament has attributed the whole of the Torah to Moses,[2] and at multiple points in the Gospels, Jesus names Moses as the authority behind the citations he gives from the Torah.[3] For anyone who honors Jesus Christ as Lord, this fact alone serves as the deciding factor in any question of authorship, at least as far as those passages go. To wholesale deny Mosaic authorship of the Torah is to disagree with Jesus.

The longstanding belief in Moses's authorship was not challenged to any great extent until the work of Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677), who argued that Moses was not the author of the Pentateuch, creating quite the stir in his day. It has since become essentially orthodoxy outside of believing circles to fully deny any contribution from Moses whatsoever to the Pentateuch, with the present popular critical opinion being that it is a composite of multiple sources stitched together. The most popular explanation of this process is known as the Documentary Hypothesis, famously associated with Karl Heinrich Graf and Julius Wellhausen.[4] This hypothesis is also known as the JEPD theory, due to its main tenet that the Torah is made up of four sources: (1) the Jahwist (J), so called for its preference for the name Yahweh; (2) the Elohist (E), so named for its preference for the name Elohim; (3) the Priestly source (P), which is supposed to make up all of the elements concerning the priests; and (4), the Deuteronomist (D), considered to encompass all of Deuteronomy. These various sources were supposedly grafted together over time and represent an evolutionary perspective of the development of the Pentateuch. In its classical form, the hypothesis assumes that Moses is not associated with these sources or responsible for the Law in any way, but it was instead anonymous later editors who compiled these disparate and contradictory sources into their present form. This hypothesis is commonly seen in many critical books on the origins of the Old Testament in their description of how the Pentateuch was formed.[5] (It is worth noting that a modified form of the JEPD theory is held by some conservative Christian scholars, though without the anti-supernatural assumptions or wholesale denial of Mosaic authorship).[6]

Responding to this theory to any large extent is outside of my scope in this book; others have ably done so.[7] I will simply briefly provide here some forms of critique leveled against the Documentary Hypothesis: It is completely conjectural and has no evidence beyond the supposed reconstructions;[8] it ignores ancient literary conventions that are quite similar to what we see in the Old Testament;[9] it assumes an ability to reconstruct the supposed sources to a higher degree than

should be possible; and the Old Testament shows knowledge of ancient culture and practice that should not be expected if the sources are as late as supposed.[10] The Documentary Hypothesis is a hypothesis that has largely been discredited while still enjoying wide popular currency. Most damning, as K. A. Kitchen puts it, is that "we have as yet *no single scrap* of external, objective (i.e., *tangible*) evidence for either the existence or history of 'J', 'E', or any other alleged source-document."[11] Ultimately, it is this complete lack of physical evidence "which has permitted so much uncontrolled (because unverifiable) theorizing in Old Testament studies."[12] Popularly assumed as it may be, the Documentary Hypothesis can marshal nothing beyond hypothetical reconstructions.

Now my point in drawing attention to the Documentary Hypothesis is to demonstrate that, though it is inherently skeptical of Mosaic and divine authorship, the idea of editors need not be rejected as wholly opposed to a high view of Scripture. That editors had a hand in the formation of the Torah is something that is actually quite evident in the text. If it turned out that Moses did not write every single word of the Torah in the form that we have today, would this undermine the authority of Scripture? I have heard it suggested that this would be the case. If your answer is yes, then I hope to convince you otherwise that affirming editorial work in the Torah is not antithetical to a high view of Scripture.

First, we should note that, though Moses is traditionally cited as the main authority behind the Torah, the books do not internally identify him as their author in totality—at least in their present textual form. This is especially true of Genesis, which gives no internal indications whatsoever as to anyone's authorship. Second, the books of the Torah bear multiple obvious places of later editorial work. We do not know what form the text was in during Moses's day, but it was certainly not in its final form as we know it now. There are multiple places where we can detect the hands of later editors who have helped shape the text. As some examples, we find (1) a reference in Genesis 14:14 to Abram pursuing his enemies as far as Dan when the city would have been then known as Laish; the city was not called Dan until after the conquest of Canaan (Judg. 18:19), which was after the death of Moses; (2) Genesis 36:31 refers to kings of Israel as if they presently reign or reigned in the past; (3) Deuteronomy 2:10–12 is a parenthetical note that looks back on the conquest of Canaan as a past event, rather than forward to it as a future event; (4) Perhaps the most obvious is the account of Moses's death in Deuteronomy 34. These and other passages[13] point toward later editorial work, which can be asserted with reasonable confidence. What cannot be stated with any confidence, however, is the extent of the editorial work, as proponents of the Documentary Hypothesis do. Even if the editorial work was quite extensive, however, it need not be in conflict with Moses as the primary source of the

material. For later editors to take material that Moses had written, edit it, and put it into the textual form that we have today does not remove Moses from the equation. Mosaic authorship is not an all-or-nothing matter; he can stand as the authority through whom God delivered his Law and his words, while later editors can have a providentially-led hand in shaping the Torah into the text as we know it today. We shall revisit this topic further in Chapter 13.

The internal evidence of the Torah points to Moses as its primary authority, as the one through whom God delivered his revelation. The internal evidence also points to some form of editorial work, where later editors seem to have had a hand in molding the text. While we cannot have certainty regarding the stages of composition and textual development, the internal testimony of the Old Testament, consistent Jewish tradition, and view of Jesus and his apostles leads me to affirm that Moses is the primary authority behind at least four books of the Torah—Genesis having no internal or external factors indicating authorship.

The Historical Books

Authorship of the historical books is a far less controversial matter than Mosaic authorship of the Torah, largely because we have no legitimate idea as to who wrote them. With the exception of Ezra and Nehemiah (which could be considered a single work), the historical books are anonymous compositions and their authorship is unimportant. We may perhaps be at least able to ascribe some of these books to a specific school, namely that of the prophets. Several factors play into this assumption.

Most suggestive is the way these books have been categorized, both in the present Jewish threefold form of the *Tanakh* and the earlier twofold form of the Law and the Prophets. The *Tanakh* is a Hebrew acronym, which stands for *Torah, Nevi'im*, and *Ketuvim* (Law, Prophets, and Writings). Many of the historical books—Joshua, Judges, 1–2 Samuel, 1–2 Kings—do not fall under the category of the writings (*Ketuvim*) in the Jewish ordering of the Old Testament as we may expect, but under the prophets (*Nevi'im*). These books would be considered the Former Prophets, and would also fall under the earlier twofold category of Law and Prophets. This makes it a not unreasonable assumption that members of the prophetic school are responsible for these books.

The prevailing view concerning the composition of the historical books is known as the Deuteronomistic History, most famously put forward by Martin Noth. The general thrust of the theory is that the historical books running from Deuteronomy to 2 Kings are a unified literary work by a single author or redactor, constructed so as to provide a theological interpretation of Israel's history. This necessarily means that Deuteronomy, or parts of it, are quite late and not related

to Moses. Deuteronomy thus becomes the introductory material and the backdrop against which the rest of Israel's history is read in the subsequent books.[14] Aside from the general assumption of the late date of Deuteronomy, the framework of the Deuteronomistic History actually fits well within an understanding of the prophets as the authority behind the composition of the Former Prophets. Joshua is a continuation of Deuteronomy, while Judges and 1–2 Kings, especially, require the backdrop of Deuteronomy. The books of 1–2 Kings are essentially a theological explanation of the eventual exile of Israel and Judah in light of the covenant curses of Deuteronomy 28. While it may not be plausible to speak of a specific author or redactor, there is certainly a unity that could reasonably be understood as the prophets documenting and interpreting Israel and Judah's history to explain why they have experienced such hardships, namely their unfaithfulness to the covenant. In this sense, we could understand the prophets as the authoritative interpreters of Israel's history.

Now we have spoken of the prophets as perhaps the most likely source behind the historical books. In terms of authorship, it is probably better to speak of prophetic editors for these books than any other in the Old Testament, especially when it comes to 1–2 Samuel, 1–2 Kings, and 1–2 Chronicles. This is because in these books it is most obvious that historians/editors are drawing upon earlier sources and editing and interpreting them. More than any other books, we see that various sources were explicitly drawn upon in the composition of these books, and quite possibly other written sources that are not named. We see references to the Book of Jashar (or the Upright), the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel/Judah, the Book of the Acts of Solomon, the Book of Gad the Seer, the History of Nathan the Prophet, the Prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite, and the Annals of Jehu, among others. We even find some texts cited, such as the proclamation of Cyrus (Ezra 1:1–4). Earlier written material existed, and this was then shaped by these unknown authors/editors, such that we now have the books as we know them today.

The notable exceptions to the anonymity of the historical books are Ezra and Nehemiah. These two books include some first-person narratives from both Ezra and Nehemiah, indicating that at least portions of these books came from the recollections of these figures. Whether they were responsible for the final text cannot be known, but at a minimum, we can say that parts of their writings were incorporated into the whole.

Poetry and Wisdom Literature

While we list poetry and wisdom literature as a single unit, we cannot make generalizations about their authorship. We will thus look at each book in turn.

Job

Concerning the authorship and composition of Job, we have little to say. It is a wholly anonymous work and the text makes no hints about who composed it. Jewish tradition ascribes Job to Moses,[15] but there is nothing internally to suggest that Moses had anything to do with writing it. It is best not to speculate and to simply accept the book as anonymous as far as we are concerned.

Psalms

Of all of the books of the Old Testament, Psalms is the one that most apparently encompasses multiple authors. Of the 150 Psalms, 73 are attributed to David, twelve to Asaph, eleven to the Sons of Korah, three to Jeduthun, two to Solomon, and a single psalm attributed to Ethan the Ezrahite, Heman the Ezrahite, and Moses, respectively. One-third of the psalms are wholly anonymous. We should note, however, that the Hebrew grammatical construction that we understand to attribute authorship is not unambiguous. It is possible that it could be understood as a general "associated with David" (or any of the other named figures), although authorship is the most likely understanding in most cases.

Though the grammar raises some minor questions about how the titles should be understood, it is the reliability of the titles themselves that raises the most controversy. Are they original? Are they late additions to the text? Are they inspired? Many would argue that the titles are not original and are therefore not historically reliable.[16] The ambiguity of how to understand the titles is perhaps best seen in Bible translations, as the titles are typically set aside in some way so as to indicate that they are not part of the text. In reality, the titles are part of the Hebrew text and make up the first verse of whichever Psalm they are part of in the Hebrew. Since there is disagreement amongst orthodox believers, let us consider some factors that will help us evaluate the titles:

- No Hebrew manuscript exists that lacks the titles; the titles are always part of the text in some form.
- By the time Psalms was translated into Greek, it would appear that some of the Hebrew in the titles was so ancient as to no longer be properly understood.[17] This suggests the titles were quite old even by the second century BC.
- The Masoretic Text (MT), which the English text of our Bibles is translated from, contains titles for 116 of the 150 Psalms. In the Septuagint (LXX; the Greek translation of the Old Testament), up to 148 of the Psalms have titles.
- The Psalms were certainly arranged by later editors, as their general arrangement into five books indicates.

Psalms is clearly an edited and arranged book, making it likely that many of the titles were added to the psalms when they were compiled. By the same token, the titles also appear to be quite old, meaning they were added sometime before the earliest manuscripts we have of the Old Testament. Yet the titles were not wholly fixed, as the additional titles and differences between the MT and LXX indicate. The most likely conclusion seems to be that the titles are old, but many—if not all—are not original to the text of the psalms that are now included in the Psalter. I would not leave that conclusion there, however; I would go further and say that though the titles are not original, they are canonical. These titles are a part of the canonical text as far back as we can see, and thus they stood as a part of the text that Jesus and the apostles would have used and also gave credence to.

We may infer that Jesus and the apostles accepted at least Davidic authorship for several of the Psalms in accordance with the titles, and at times, in the absence of titles—at least absent when compared to the MT. As some examples,[18] Jesus names David as the author of Psalm 110 (Matt. 22:43–45; Mark 12:35–37; Luke 20:41–44) and Peter refers to the Holy Spirit as speaking through the mouth of David when he cites Psalm 69:25 and 109:8 (Acts 1:15–20), which agrees with the titles. Yet the apostles also cite David as the author of Psalm 2 (Acts 4:25), which bears no title in the MT, but does in the LXX. Some may dismiss this as Jesus and the apostles speaking conventionally,[19] but the weight of New Testament citations would lead, at least on theological grounds, to the conclusion that David authored these and other Psalms. Though the titles may not be original to the psalms as initially composed, we do not therefore need to conclude that they are unreliable.

Books Commonly Attributed to Solomon

The book of Proverbs opens with the title: "These are the proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel" (1:1). This identifies Solomon as an author, though not necessarily the author of the whole of Proverbs. It is apparent that he is not responsible for the whole when we see that all of chapter 30 contains the proverbs of Agur, while 31:1–9 is attributed to Lemuel. It seems more likely that the book of Proverbs is a compilation of various collections of proverbs, some associated with Solomon, others not. Suggestive of this type of compilation are the sections that are attributed to "the wise" (22:17–24:22 and 24:23–34), as well as the statement in 25:1 about what follows: "These are additional proverbs of Solomon, which were copied by the men of Hezekiah king of Judah." Many proverbs certainly go back to Solomon, but we cannot speak of him as the author of Proverbs in its final form. Other figures compiled Proverbs as we know it, taking proverbs of Solomon and of others and arranging them into the configuration we

know today. We are again in a position of speaking of editors and compilers just as much as we are of speaking of authors of the Old Testament.

Who to consider the author of Ecclesiastes largely comes down to matters of interpretation. Ecclesiastes opens with the introduction, "These are the words of the Teacher [Qoheleth], the son of David, king in Jerusalem." The traditional author is understood to be Solomon and the information provided is suggestive of him, but the text does not explicitly name him. Linguistically speaking, the title "son of David" could refer to any number of the Judean kings who descended from David. We also see two clear voices present in the book: the third-person voice in the prologue and epilogue (Eccl. 1:1–11; 12:19–13), and then the first-person voice of Qoheleth that makes up the rest of the text. It appears then that we have the earlier figure, Qoheleth (whether identified with Solomon or not), and then the later figure who provides the commentary in the prologue and epilogue. Various interpretive issues are at play,[20] so at best we can say that the exact authorship of Ecclesiastes is uncertain.

The Song of Songs (or Song of Solomon) is also commonly associated with Solomon based upon the opening of the book: "The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's." There is, however, some ambiguity as to how verse 1:1 should be understood. The Hebrew grammatical form which is used for "is Solomon's" is the same as the form that is in the titles of the Psalms. Viewing Solomon as the author would be the most common way of understanding what is meant, yet it could also be understood in terms of dedication ("for Solomon") or broad association ("about Solomon" or "pertaining to Solomon"). Solomon is thus the most likely author, but some uncertainty remains.

Our general conclusion as regards the books traditionally attributed to Solomon is that his authorship is either partial or uncertain. I note again, the authority of the books does not depend upon Solomon having been responsible in whole or in part for authoring these books. These are portions of the oracles of God that were entrusted to the Jews (Rom. 3:2) and their authority depends upon whether the Holy Spirit has spoken through them, not whether Solomon has.

The Prophets

In all circumstances but one or two, we can speak of the named prophets as being the authorities standing behind the books that bear their names. Jonah is the notable exception, for it is a third-person account of Jonah that seems to have been written by another figure, while the narrative portions of Daniel would also seem to fit the same pattern. Most of the prophetic works are oracles that God delivered to his prophets, which were then put down into words and preserved for us. Now whether the prophets themselves put pen to parchment and arranged the

books as we now know them is open to speculation. These are the questions of composition that we can never know. Perhaps suggestive that scribes were responsible for the actual writing and compiling of the prophecies is the fact that Jeremiah employed Baruch the scribe, who is recorded as writing on a scroll what Jeremiah dictated to him (Jer. 36:4). That a similar state of affairs could have existed for other prophets is possible, but anything beyond what we read of Baruch is speculation.

It is perfectly reasonable to also speak of the potential role of editors and compilers when it comes to the finished form of the prophets, particularly of the Major Prophets. Where this is most apparent is in a comparison between Isaiah 36–37 and 2 Kings 18:13–19:37; the texts are almost exactly identical. This suggests that there is literary dependence one way or the other—2 Kings borrowing from Isaiah or Isaiah borrowing from 2 Kings—or mutual dependence upon a single source. Since we know that multiple sources were used in the composition of 1–2 Kings, it does not seem unreasonable to assume that this same source could have been used in the literary composition of Isaiah. The exact direction of dependence is unknown, but two of the possibilities point to an editor using other material in compiling Isaiah. One final factor that lends itself to the reasonableness of editorial work especially in the Major Prophets is the reality that these books are quite large. The prophecies contained in them were not delivered all at once but over a period of many years. Some sort of compiling process would have needed to take place, whether by the prophet himself or by others. This necessitates some sort of editorial work, either in the lifetime of the prophet or after it.

Conclusion

When we think about the authors of the Old Testament, many are simply not known and their identities are, quite frankly, unimportant. My aim here is not to disrupt traditional views of Old Testament authorship but to point out that some tightly held views concerning the authorship of certain books of the Old Testament are unnecessary and do not arise from the text itself. Just because critical scholars raise questions about elements of traditional authorship does not mean that we must dig our heels in and deny any validity to their findings. If there is anything I have hoped to have convinced you of, it is that editors playing a role in the composition and development of the final canonical form of the text is not a conclusion that is antithetical to a high view of Scripture. If God could guide the authors to produce the message he wanted, why could he not also guide later editors to shape the text into the form he wanted as well? The presence of editors and/or compilers is quite apparent at various points in the text of the Old Testa-

ment, and at others, it is more speculative, but it is there to one degree or another all the same.

Where the internal testimony of the text or the later testimony of Jesus and the apostles affirms traditional authorship of books of the Old Testament, there is no reason to cast it aside. At other points, traditional authorship is not as strongly supported as might sometimes be supposed. Whether we know the authors of the various books of the Old Testament or not is a matter of indifference; these are the books that Jesus and the apostles accepted in their day and the ones that Paul could affirm as God-breathed. If they are God-breathed and the Holy Spirit was operative in their composition, then the precise human vessel is ultimately not of great significance.

Further Reading

Longman III, Tremper, and Raymond B. Dillard. *An Introduction to the Old Testament.* 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006.

Van Pelt, Miles V., ed. *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament: The Gospel Promised*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016.

3·
The Authors of the New Testament

In comparison with the Old Testament, the authorship of the New Testament is a relatively straightforward matter. After all, Paul identifies himself in all of his letters, as do James, Jude, and Peter. But have you ever stopped to think that a number of the books of the New Testament are essentially anonymous works, at least as far as the text itself is concerned? Nowhere in the text of the Gospels is the author named, the author of Acts is anonymous, neither is a name given in 1–3 John nor in Hebrews. Except for Hebrews, which today is not strongly identified with a specific author, how is it that we have come to identify the authors of these works? As we did with the Old Testament, we will now consider some matters of New Testament authorship.

The Gospels

We likely rarely ever think of the Gospels as anonymous, but as far as their texts are concerned, they never actually identify an author. This does not mean that they were strictly anonymous to the point that the original audiences would have had no idea who was responsible for them, but they do not go out of their way to state, "I, Luke, composed this Gospel by my own hand." If the text gives no names, where did the names in the titles come from? This is the question we will seek to answer.

As far back as we can historically tell, the titles of the evangelists have always been associated with the four canonical Gospels. The earliest extant testimony

about who wrote the Gospels comes from a man named Papias of Hierapolis (c. 60 – c. 130), who was described as "an ancient man who was a hearer of John and a companion of Polycarp"[1] (we will have more to say about Polycarp later). He lived at least while John was still alive, as well as others who had heard the apostles, and he was concerned with gathering what traditions from the apostles that he could.[2] Writing perhaps around the year 110, and likely relating a tradition that goes back even earlier, he says:

> And the elder used to say this: "Mark, having become Peter's interpreter, wrote down accurately everything he remembered, though not in order, of the things either said or done by Christ. For he neither heard the Lord nor followed him, but afterward, as I said, followed Peter, who adapted his teachings as needed but had no intention of giving an ordered account of the Lord's sayings. Consequently Mark did nothing wrong in writing down some things as he remembered them, for he made it his one concern not to omit anything that he heard or to make any false statement in them… So Matthew composed the oracles in the Hebrew language and each person interpreted them as best he could."[3]

This passage from Papias opens up some interesting questions that have been the subject of scholarly debate (which we will not engage in here), but there are three points of interest worth noting. First, Papias ascribes at least his testimony concerning Mark to "the elder," who is possibly to be identified with the apostle John. Second is the association of Mark with Peter: Mark's Gospel is essentially Peter's Gospel. Although Mark compiled the Gospel, its source is largely Peter.[4] Aside from the interesting question of what Papias meant by "the Hebrew language," it is noteworthy that Papias applies the name Matthew, a rather obscure disciple, to one of the Gospels, which is indicative of the name being attached quite early.

The earliest extant testimony concerning the naming of John and Luke comes from Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130 – c. 202) around the year 180, who is a significant figure in his own right. He was a disciple of Polycarp, who was in turn a disciple of John, meaning Irenaeus is only two steps removed from the apostle. He rehearses the testimony we have from Papias concerning Mark and Matthew and adds to it:

> Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome, and laying the foundations of the Church. After their departure, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter. Luke also, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the Gospel preached by him. Afterwards, John, the disciple

> of the Lord, who also had leaned upon His breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia.[5]

The names of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are the only names we know to have ever been attached to these Gospels. Despite claims that the titles of the Gospels are later additions,[6] there are strong reasons to think that these titles were original or nearly original to the works themselves.[7] Several factors suggest this. First are the names of the evangelists: aside from the apostle John, the three evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke are rather obscure figures. This obscurity actually lends to the credibility of them being the true authors; why choose relatively unknown figures? Second, there is no extant evidence that any other names were ever attached to the Gospels. Third, the very titles of the Gospels in the manuscript tradition presuppose the existence and knowledge of at least one other Gospel. In the manuscript tradition, the titles are typically presented as "The Gospel According to Mark" (*euangelion kata markon*) or "The Gospel According to Matthew" (*euangelion kata mathaion*), and so forth.[8] Our common manner of referring to the "Gospel of Mark" or the "Gospel of Matthew" can imply multiple gospel messages, as if there were more than one, but the original Gospel titles make clear that there is but one gospel according to different evangelists. If no other Gospels were known, it seems likely that the circumstances requiring such a naming convention would not exist. The introduction to Luke's Gospel even indicates that he was aware of other Gospel-like writings:

> Many have undertaken to compose an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by the initial eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, having carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught. (Luke 1:1–4).

Given Papias's comment that Mark "wrote down accurately everything he remembered, though not in order," Luke's intention to give an orderly account is perhaps indicative of setting in order what Mark had not. This supposition is related to what is known as the Synoptic Problem. The three synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—are all related literarily, to the point that the writers almost certainly borrowed from each other in some way. The most common explanation for this dependence is that Mark was written first and then Matthew and Luke borrowed and adapted material from Mark.[9] If this is the case, and it likely is in some form, then there is immediately a need to differentiate Matthew and Luke's Gospel from Mark's, hence the need to provide titles.



Figure 3.1. The cover of Codex Amiatinus, the oldest surviving complete manuscript of the Latin Vulgate (8th century). The four evangelists are depicted in the four corners

While doctrine does not hang upon knowing the exact authors of the Gospels, there is little reason to suppose that the names we have are erroneous. The church has always understood the Gospels as written by apostles or associates of apostles, and, as far as we can tell, has always understood these four individuals to be the ones responsible for the four Gospels.

The Acts of the Apostles

Naming Luke as the author of Acts is intrinsically tied to the naming of Luke as the author of the Gospel that bears his name; the two works are so closely tied that they are often referred to as the single unit of Luke-Acts. The earliest extant testimony to explicitly name Luke also comes from Irenaeus, who called Luke "inseparable from Paul" and said that since "Luke was present at all these occurrences, he carefully noted them down in writing."[10] The internal evidence, which Irenaeus in fact mentions in the cited passage, points to the author of Acts being a companion of Paul. At various points in the narrative, the voice of Acts shifts to mentioning "we," such as in Acts 16:10 when we see the statement, "we got ready to leave for Macedonia."[11] These "we" statements show that the writer was with Paul on these occasions, though the text gives no indication as to who this traveling companion could be. From Paul's letters, however, we find three references to Luke as a fellow worker with Paul who was also with him at the time of writing.[12]

While there would be no reason to assume Luke was the author of Acts on a purely internal basis, the close association with Luke's Gospel, church tradition, and the internal consistency of Acts leads us to identify Luke as the author.

Paul's Epistles

The question of Pauline authorship is quite straightforward, as he identifies himself in each of his thirteen epistles in the New Testament and the church accepted these letters as Pauline from the very beginning. Perhaps the most we can ask of these epistles is, *did Paul himself write the epistles?* Almost certainly not; it is doubtful that he personally penned any of them. He most likely dictated all of his epistles to a scribe, or, in more technical parlance, to an amanuensis. We see explicit evidence where Paul used an amanuensis in Romans, where Tertius breaks into the greetings with the statement, "I, Tertius, who wrote down this letter, greet you in the Lord" (Rom. 16:22). Reflective of an amanuensis are the multiple times where Paul indicates that he has taken up the pen to sign his own name.[13] In other epistles, Paul may not even be considered the sole author: in the greetings of multiple epistles, he identifies other associates who were with him, such as Sosthenes,[14] Timothy,[15] and Silas,[16] who may have played a role in the development of the epistle. We thus should not think of authorship as a matter of who personally wrote the letter but in terms of who is the primary authority behind its contents. In that regard, the primary authority behind each epistle, regardless of input from others, is unquestionably Paul.

Despite the long and universal recognition of Paul's epistles and complete lack of doubt over their authenticity for eighteen centuries, it has become common (even orthodoxy!) in critical scholarly circles to consider only seven epistles to be genuine: Romans, 1–2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon. The remaining letters are considered to be pseudonymous, that is, falsely written under Paul's name. These conclusions are reached largely on presuppositions about theology and differences in vocabulary and style in the letters. For example, the ecclesiology (doctrine of the church) of the pastoral epistles (1–2 Timothy and Titus) is presumed to be too developed and thus must reflect a later time in church history. It is often proposed that these epistles were forged in the name of Paul to provide more firepower in second-century theological disputes.[17] On stylistic grounds, the letters are deemed to vary too much from the other epistles of Paul, with over a third of the words (306) not appearing anywhere else in his other epistles.[18] The theological arguments assume that the situation described in the pastorals reflects a second-century context, such that the first-century church had not yet developed such a structure. The stylistic and vocabulary differences sound less impressive when we consider just how small of a sample from

Paul we actually have and how prejudicial the idea is that style could never change in different circumstances. N. T. Wright is worth quoting at length concerning the difficulties of making any firm arguments on stylistic grounds, here arguing in favor of Pauline authorship of Colossians and Ephesians, though it is equally applicable to the whole Pauline corpus:

> Arguments from style are clearly important in principle. But they are hard to make in practice. We have such a tiny sample of Paul's writing, hardly an adequate database for definite conclusions about authorship. Those who have done computer analyses of Paul's style come up with more 'conservative' results than we might have expected. In fact, if it's stylistic differences we want, the most striking are, in my opinion, the radical differences between 1 and 2 Corinthians. The second letter to Corinth is much jerkier; its sentences are dense and convoluted, bending back on themselves, twisting to and fro with language about God, Jesus Christ, and Paul's ministry. The organization of the material is much less crisp. There is a far greater difference between those two Corinthian letters that there is between Galatians and Romans on the one hand and Ephesians and Colossians on the other; yet nobody for that reason cast doubt on 2 Corinthians. As John A. T. Robinson pointed out from his personal experience a generation ago, a busy church leader may well write in very different styles for different occasions and audiences. The same person can be working simultaneously on a large academic project with careful, ponderous sentences and a short, snappy talk for the Sunday school. It has not been unknown for senior biblical scholars to write children's fiction. More directly to the point, it has recently been argued strikingly that Ephesians and Colossians show evidence of a deliberate 'Asiatic' style which Paul could easily have adopted for readers in western Turkey.' I regard the possibility of significant variation in Paul's own style as much higher than the possibility that someone else, a companion or co-worker could achieve such a measure of similarity. Other historical examples of that genre do not encourage us to suppose they would have been so successful.[19]

Arguments against Paul's authorship of the other six epistles are a relatively recent phenomenon and arise from certain presuppositions. All of the epistles included in our New Testament were universally accepted as Paul's by the church fathers and beyond. As we will see in our chapters on the canon, early Christians were not so credulous as to simply accept anything that had an apostle's name attached to it; they sought what had been written by apostles and had been handed down by them. Other letters attributed to Paul, such as 3 Corinthian*s* and the Epistle to the

Laodiceans, were not accepted as Pauline and recognized as not having originated with him. Challenges are recent and the question of authorship has been ably defended.[20]

Hebrews

The most problematic book regarding authorship is the Epistle to the Hebrews. While consensus has existed in the church around the authorship of all other New Testament books, none has truly existed for Hebrews. It is not hard to see why, since the text never names its author. From an early date, it was thought that Paul had written the epistle, though this was far from a unanimous opinion, and even then, it was not without speculation. For example, Clement of Alexandria thought it was written by Paul in Hebrew and then translated into Greek by Luke. He also knew of another individual who suggested that Paul intentionally wrote the epistle anonymously so that the Hebrews would not immediately reject the letter.[21] But other names were also suggested in addition to Paul. Tertullian believed the author to be Barnabas.[22] Origen gave the opinion that the thoughts of the epistle were Paul's, but the actual words were written by "some one who remembered the apostolic teachings, and wrote down at his leisure what had been said by his teacher." He also indicates that others he knew of had suggested Clement of Rome or Luke.[23] Even during the Reformation, Martin Luther thought Apollos might have been the author. Internally, the epistle indicates it may have been written by a second-generation Christian who had received the apostles' teaching. This is suggested by the statement that "[the message] was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard Him" (Heb. 2:3). Any specific identity is merely speculation. So who wrote Hebrews? We really do not know. It is probably best to say, as Origen did, that "the thoughts of the epistle are admirable, and not inferior to the acknowledged apostolic writings, any one who carefully examines the apostolic text will admit… But who wrote the epistle, in truth, God knows."[24]

The Catholic Epistles

Commonly known as the General Epistles, these epistles have historically been grouped together and known as the Catholic Epistles because they have been considered universal (or general) in scope rather than particular ("catholic" means universal). They are a collection of short epistles by multiple authors, so we will look at each in turn by author.

1–3 John

The epistle of 1 John does not name its author, but it does identify its author as one who has heard, seen, and touched with his hands that concerning which he

testifies (1 John 1:1–3). The second and third epistles attributed to John only bear the title of "the elder" in their introductions. In this sense, the epistles are not anonymous to the original recipients, but they are anonymous, strictly speaking, to later generations if all we had to go off of was the text itself. Early church fathers such as Irenaeus[25] and Clement of Alexandria[26] name John the apostle as the author of these epistles, while the Muratorian Fragment mentions two epistles and also ascribes them to the apostle. Some doubt existed about whether 2 and 3 John were penned by a different John rather than John the apostle.[27] This other John is sometimes proposed to be one John the Elder.[28] It seems a reasonable assumption that the basis for these epistles all being associated with the apostle John is that they were closely associated with his Gospel as part of a Johannine corpus.[29]

1–2 Peter

The first epistle of Peter identifies Peter as its author and was recognized from an early date. The second epistle has had a more troubled history. While the epistle identifies itself as from Simon Peter, it was a disputed book in the early church, leading to some questions as to its authenticity. The question of authorship here is not who is identified as the author, but whether the author identified is actually who is responsible for it. We will discuss this epistle and evidence of its authenticity further in Chapter 10.

James

The epistle identifies James as the author, but it does not identify its author any further than that. James was a very popular name—the name is equivalent to Jacob—and there are three notable figures who we could choose from: 1) James the son of Zebedee, the brother of John; 2) James the son of Alphaeus, a lesser-known member of the twelve disciples; 3) James the Just, the brother of the Lord. We can probably rule out James the son of Zebedee as he was martyred rather early in the church's history (Acts 12:2). James the son of Alphaeus is certainly possible, but James the Just is the most probable. The general early consensus has been to identify the author as James the Just, though there were also disputes about the authenticity of the book.[30]

Jude

The name Jude is again very common, being the equivalent of Judas or Judah (these were all the same name in Hebrew in reality). The identification of Jude as the "brother of James" (v. 1) makes it likely that he is the brother of James the Just, meaning Jude is another brother of Jesus.[31]

Revelation

The author of Revelation is named as John, which is straightforward enough, though John was also a relatively common name. The earliest testimony we possess identified this John as John the apostle. In the third century, however, the waters were muddied a bit by one Dionysius of Alexandria. He regarded someone named John to have been the author, and he also agreed that Revelation was "the work of a holy and inspired man," but he nonetheless did not believe that this was the apostle John who had written the Gospel and the first epistle (he apparently did not recognize John as the author of 2–3 John either).[32] Dionysius largely came to his conclusion based on stylistic differences he discerned between Revelation and the Gospel of John and 1 John. This led to some later confusion about whether the author of Revelation was John the apostle or a different John, sometimes identified as John the Elder. The question of authorship and theological disputes led to problems for Revelation in the canon; we will look more closely at how this played out in Chapter 10. Despite these later doubts that arose about the identity of John, the second- and early third-century testimony is unanimous that this John is identifiable with the apostle John. These include Justin Martyr,[33] Irenaeus of Lyons,[34] Hippolytus of Rome,[35] Clement of Alexandria,[36] Tertullian,[37] and the Muratorian Fragment.

Conclusion

The authorship of the New Testament is a fairly obvious and straightforward matter, such that it may almost seem so obvious that it is not worth spending time on it. Yet there are certain anonymous books that we attach names to; it is well worth knowing why we speak of the authors of the Gospels or assume that John wrote the epistles that bear his name. Aside from the Epistle to the Hebrews, no book truly remains anonymous in the life of the church. As to the matter of Pauline authorship, we do not consider such doubts to be legitimate, but it is good to be aware that such doubts are raised. While authorship is a largely unimportant matter for the canon of the Old Testament, knowing the origin of a book was of supreme importance for the canon of the New Testament. With this in mind, we now turn to the question of the canon of Scripture.

Further Reading

Carson, D. A. and Douglas J. Moo. *An Introduction to the New Testament*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2009.

Kruger, Michael J., ed. A *Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament: The Gospel Realized*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016.

Part 2: The Canon of Scripture

4.
Canon Defined

We turn now to the question of the canon of Scripture. Why do we have the books that we have in our Bible? Why these ones and not others? In this section, we will look at how the canon of the Old and New Testaments developed. But before we dive into the historical facts, we will look at what we mean by canon and provide some definitions that will help us in tracing its development. We will also explain why the books of the canon do not derive their authority from being included in canonical lists but are instead included in canonical lists because they are authoritative and inspired books.

Canon as a Closed List

In today's American culture, the word *canon* is often used to refer to whether something is *canonically* true of a fictional universe. For example, the books and stories from the Star Wars expanded universe is no longer canonical while the sequel trilogy is now a part of the canon—to the great chagrin of many.[1] This understanding of canon—that something is declared true or accepted—is not quite what we mean when we speak of the canon of Scripture. The word *canon* comes into English from the Greek *kanōn* (κανών), a word which means a measuring rod or a rule. This word came to be used in terms of standards of orthodox belief as defined in creeds and in the rule of faith (Latin *regula fidei*). The term also came to be employed in the way we continue to use it today when we speak of the canon of Scripture: those books that are recognized as carrying divine authority

and are the standard against which our faith and practice are measured. Additionally, the term *canon* commonly communicates a closed and stable list. Unlike the Star Wars universe, books are not being added to or removed from the canon; the canon of Scripture is simply the books that make up the Bible. The Gospel of John is authoritative and inspired, while the Gospel of Thomas is not; thus the Gospel of John is in the canon, while the Gospel of Thomas is not. The canon of Scripture is fixed and unchanging.

Speaking of a Developing Canon

Our concern in this section is to trace how we came to have the canon of the Old and New Testaments as they stand today. The struggle we may face, however, if we understand canon primarily in terms of a closed and stable list of books, is how should we consider books before the canonization process was completed? This problem is especially apparent when we look at the development of the New Testament canon. What of books that were once largely regarded as canonical and then later rejected? We encounter this issue with the Apocrypha. Looking at canon as a closed and defined set of books works well at the conclusion of the historical process, but it is inadequate for looking at historical development. Two approaches can help us understand the development of the canon.

The first is to approach historical development with the maxim that *authority precedes canonicity*.[2] The books in our Bible are not authoritative because they are canonical, but they are canonical because they are authoritative. The compilation of a list of canonical books reflects the authority that the books were recognized to possess and to exhibit in the life of the believing community prior to official canonization. Tracing the level of authority books were accorded is the primary criterion we will use for understanding how the canon developed and was later crystallized.

Our second way of accounting for the weakness of the standard understanding of canon is provided by Michael Kruger. In his book *The Question of Canon*, Kruger proposes a threefold definition of canon: the exclusive definition, the functional definition, and the ontological definition.[3] While he proposed these categories in relation to the development of the New Testament canon, I find these to be helpful when considering the Old Testament canon as well.

The *exclusive definition* is basically how we view *canon* at the present time—as a "fixed, final, and closed list of books."[4] When we think of canon according to this definition, we think specifically of the 39 books in the Old Testament and the 27 books in the New Testament. The boundaries are clearly drawn and the matter is definitely settled; we simply take our Bibles with their canon as they are. This definition, as we have mentioned, is quite limited when it comes to the develop-

ment of the canon, for how can we speak of a closed list of books before that list was closed and finalized? We thus need further definition.

The *functional definition* helps us when we think of the canon while it was developing and not yet crystallized. In this sense, we can speak of *canon* when "a collection of religious books functions as a religious norm."[5] This is the *functional* definition because it is less concerned with closed lists and final states, but considers when books were *functioning* as canonical. This also means that we can acknowledge that some books which were not ultimately recognized as canonical *functioned* as canonical for certain groups and for a certain period of time. The definition allows us to speak of a canon while looking at its development from a historical perspective, but it runs the risk of presenting *canon* as the arbitrary result of how books functioned and continue to function to the present. Why these books and not others? Thus the helpfulness of Kruger's third definition.

In the *ontological definition* of canon, we speak of books as canonical simply by virtue of what they are: namely, the Word of God. As Kruger explains, under this definition, "Books do not *become* canonical—they are canonical because they are the books God has given as a permanent guide for his church. Thus, from this perspective, it is the existence of the canonical books that is determinative, not their function or reception."[6] This line of thinking jives well with our recognition of how we ultimately have come to have the Bible: God spoke. God spoke and delivered revelation, thus a canon existed from the moment he chose to bring it into time. In an ultimate sense, the canon is not authoritative because it is in a list or because it functions as canon, but because it is the collection of the very words of God.

Conclusion

The threefold definition gives us a framework for understanding how the canon developed. God spoke and the Holy Spirit moved men to write, thus an authoritative canon came into existence (ontological definition). The God-breathed books came to be recognized and were seen and used as authoritative standards (functional definition). Over time, they were compiled into a list and marked out such that no other books could be considered authoritative in the same way (exclusive definition). We understand the canonical process to be one in which we move from the nature and existence of the books, on to their recognition and use, and then finally to the final and crystallized form of the canon.

The books of Scripture are not authoritative because they are in the canon, but they are in the canon because they are authoritative. Since we will be primarily looking at the canon of Scripture in terms of its historical development, we will be largely concerned with canon in a functional sense and how this coincides with the recognition of the ontological canon, finally resulting in the fixed exclusive

canon that we know today. Authority precedes canonicity in the exclusive sense of the term, so authority in the life of the people of God will be our guiding markers. We might detect this authority through such things as the ways the books are quoted (e.g., "it is written"), authoritative usage, or inclusion in certain lists which may or may not reflect a final state. Perhaps most determinative will be whether books were considered to be from God and delivered through his authorized agents. With canon defined, we now turn to the historical process of how the canon came to be.

Further Reading

Kruger, Michael J. *The Question of Canon:* Challenging *the Status Quo in the New Testament Debate.* Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013.

5.
The Jewish Canon of the Old Testament

The canon of the Old Testament contains 39 books. Just ask any Protestant to open up their Bible and count them. Or maybe it is 46; that's what a Roman Catholic would find. What gives? The basic difference between the Protestant and Roman Catholic canon of the Old Testament comes down to seven books, commonly referred to as the Apocrypha: Tobit, Judith, Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach (also known as Ben Sira or Ecclesiasticus), Baruch, and 1–2 Maccabees, along with additional material in Daniel and Esther. Protestants do not regard these as authoritative, while Roman Catholics do. And this is not to mention the 49-book canon in the Eastern Orthodox tradition. Why the disagreement? If different Christian traditions can disagree on the contents of the Old Testament, can we even know what the Old Testament should be? The answer to this question is yes because we can fully discern where the differences come from: Protestants follow the Jewish canon of the Old Testament, while Roman Catholics (and Eastern Orthodox) follow the tradition of the additional books found in the Septuagint. We will discuss these additional books in more detail in the following chapter. In this chapter, we will seek to determine the extent of the Jewish canon and when it came to be established.

The Arrangement of the Old Testament

The traditional Jewish arrangement of the Old Testament books follows a different scheme than we as Christians use. We are accustomed to thinking of the Old

Testament as arranged according to the Pentateuch (or Law), the historical books, poetry and wisdom literature, and the Prophets (Major and Minor). The first book of the Old Testament is Genesis, and the last book is Malachi. Our ordering is not the traditional Jewish one, as we inherit our common arrangement of the canonical books from the Hellenistic tradition as represented in the Septuagint (LXX), albeit with some slight differences. The Jewish arrangement can be seen in the term *Tanakh*, which Jews use to refer to the Old Testament. The term *Tanakh*, as mentioned in Chapter 2, is a Hebrew acronym that denotes the threefold arrangement of the canon: *Torah* (Law), *Nevi'im* (Prophets), and *Ketuvim* (Writings). The Pentateuch and Torah arrangements are identical between the Christian and Jewish canons, but there are some significant departures after this, such as books that we Christians call the historical books being listed under the Prophets (Joshua, Judges, 1–2 Samuel, 1–2 Kings) or the final book of the canon being 2 Chronicles instead of Malachi. These differences, however, do not reflect any

Figure 5.1. The arrangement of the Old Testament according to the Jewish ordering of the Tanakh and the standard Christian ordering.

Christian		**Jewish (*Tanakh*)**	
Pentateuch	***Poetry/Wisdom***	***Torah***	***Ketuvim***
1. Genesis	18. Job	1. Genesis	14. Psalms
2. Exodus	19. Psalms	2. Exodus	15. Proverbs
3. Leviticus	20. Proverbs	3. Leviticus	16. Job
4. Numbers	21. Ecclesiastes	4. Numbers	17. Song of Songs
5. Deuteronomy	22. Song of Songs	5. Deuteronomy	18. Ruth
			19. Lamentations
Historical Books	***Prophets***	***Nevi'im***	20. Ecclesiastes
6. Joshua	23. Isaiah	6. Joshua	21. Esther
7. Judges	24. Jeremiah	7. Judges	22. Daniel
8. Ruth	25. Lamentations	8. Samuel	23. Ezra-Nehemiah
9. 1 Samuel	26. Ezekiel	9. Kings	24. Chronicles
10. 2 Samuel	27. Daniel	10. Isaiah	
11. 1 Kings	28. Hosea	11. Jeremiah	
12. 2 Kings	29. Joel	12. Ezekiel	
13. 1 Chronicles	30. Amos	13. The Twelve	
14. 2 Chronicles	31. Obadiah		
15. Ezra	32. Jonah		
16. Nehemiah	33. Micah		
17. Esther	34. Nahum		
	35. Habakkuk		
	36. Zephaniah		
	37. Haggai		
	38. Zechariah		
	39. Malachi		

differences in content, simply differences in arrangement; there is no inherent superiority in one over the other.

Another difference between the Christian and Jewish arrangement of the Old Testament is in how the books are numbered. Protestants number the Old Testament at 39 books, while Jews number it at 24. This seems to be quite a divergence, but there is again no difference in content. The Minor Prophets are all lumped together in a single book known as The Twelve, while other paired books, such as 1–2 Samuel, are combined into a single volume. The Jewish threefold arrangement of the *Tanakh* is a later development, probably occurring by the late second or early third century AD. This arrangement postdates the time of the New Testament, so why address it here? Because it helps draw attention to the fact that the Jews categorized the books of the Old Testament differently than we are accustomed to, and this was most likely true of the earlier period as well.

Prior to the threefold arrangement of the *Tanakh*, a twofold arrangement was common: the Law and the Prophets. This is the terminology that we see Jesus use in the New Testament (e.g., Matt. 7:12; Luke 16:16). It is also terminology that predates the time of Jesus, dating back at least as early as the second or third century BC. This tells us the terminology that was used to speak of Scripture, but it does not tell us how many books were included in this number.

The Extent of the Canon in Jewish Sources

Our major question is what the extent of the canon was in the time of Jesus. What books did Jesus and the apostles view as authoritative? As we look at the evidence for the extent of the canon, we will begin with the most recent testimony and work our way backwards.

The Babylonian Talmud

The tractate *Baba Bathra* from the Babylonian Talmud is the earliest canon list written in Hebrew that we possess. This tractate contains what is known as a *baraita*, a tradition that dates to at least around AD 200 and quite possibly even earlier than that. In addition to providing us with the earliest list of books in Hebrew, it is also our earliest source for the threefold ordering that came to be known as the *Tanakh*. There is no discussion of the Torah, as it is simply assumed:

> The Sages taught: The order of the books of the Prophets when they are attached together is as follows: Joshua and Judges, Samuel and Kings, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and Isaiah and the Twelve Prophets. … The order of the Writings is: Ruth and the book of Psalms, and Job and Proverbs; Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, and Lamentations; Daniel and the Scroll of Esther; and Ezra and Chronicles.[1]

Once we account for the Torah, this list of books accords with what we have in our Old Testament canon today. While this list is relatively late, it almost certainly reflects a canon that is much earlier.

Flavius Josephus

The earliest writer who specifically enumerates the number of Old Testament books is the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (AD c. 37 – c. 100) in his defense of Judaism toward the end of the first century:

> For we have not an innumerable multitude of books among us, disagreeing from and contradicting one another, [as the Greeks have,] but only twenty-two books, which contain the records of all the past times; which are justly believed to be divine; and of them five belong to Moses, which contain his laws and the traditions of the origin of mankind till his death. This interval of time was little short of three thousand years; but as to the time from the death of Moses till the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, who reigned after Xerxes, the prophets, who were after Moses, wrote down what was done in their times in thirteen books. The remaining four books contain hymns to God, and precepts for the conduct of human life. It is true, our history has been written since Artaxerxes very particularly, but has not been esteemed of the same authority with the former by our forefathers, because there has not been an exact succession of prophets since that time; and how firmly we have given credit to these books of our own nation is evident by what we do; for during so many ages as have already passed, no one has been so bold as either to add any thing to them, to take any thing from them, or to make any change in them; but it is become natural to all Jews immediately, and from their very birth, to esteem these books to contain Divine doctrines, and to persist in them, and, if occasion be willing to die for them.[2]

We see that Josephus numbers the books as 22 in number and provides a threefold arrangement of his books: five of Moses, thirteen of the prophets, and four of hymns and precepts. While he does not specifically name what these books are, there is no doubt about the five books of Moses. The reduction to 22 could possibly be accomplished by attaching Ruth to Judges and Lamentations to Jeremiah. It seems unlikely that Josephus would have created this ordering on his own, but it is likely a tradition that he received.[3] Beyond the numbering, several things are noteworthy about how Josephus presents his argument. First, he assumes that he is representing mainstream Jewish thought regarding the extent of their Scriptures. Second, he affirms that no other authoritative books have been written since the time of Artaxerxes; this time just about coincides with the date of Malachi.

Third, he says that no one has dared to add or take away from these books, showing how high in regard these books were esteemed. If we take Josephus at his word, then the canon of the Old Testament had been well-established for some time before he wrote.

4 Esdras

The book of 4 Esdras, also known as 2 Esdras or 4 Ezra, is a Jewish apocalyptic and pseudepigraphal work, possibly written in the first century AD. It is a collection of visions that are said to have been given to Ezra—the same Ezra who lived in the fifth century BC and returned with the exiles to Jerusalem. This book was never accepted by the Jews and has experienced varying degrees of use by Christians; it is considered apocryphal by all major Christian traditions. Within this book, we find a hint that the author knew of a 24-book Hebrew canon:

> Ninety-four scrolls were written in the forty days. Then when the forty days were completed, the Most High said to me, "Make public the ones you wrote first so that the worthy and unworthy may read them. But keep the last seventy so that you may transmit them to the wise among your people. In these are the fountains of understanding, the source of wisdom, and the river of knowledge." And so I did (4 Esdras 14:44–48).

The 24 public books—94 minus 70 in the passage—may be identifiable with the 24 known and canonical Old Testament books. As to what the other 70 referred to, we may presume they referred to works similar to 4 Esdras, but any firm conclusions would be speculation.

Philo of Alexandria

It has been proposed that there were two Jewish canons: the Palestinian and the Alexandrian. The Palestinian is the smaller Jewish canon that we are discussing here, while the Alexandrian canon was larger and included the books of the Apocrypha. If this were the case, we would expect to find some evidence of this in the most famous Alexandrian Jew, Philo (c. 20 BC – c. AD 50). But this is exactly what we do not find; we see no evidence that he accepted a wider canon, for not once does he quote any of the books of the Apocrypha. Instead, his quotations are largely from the Torah with several from other books of the Old Testament. While we cannot be certain of the exact extent of the books he accepted as authoritative, we can deduce from his quotations that "Philo's core collection of sacred books included the Torah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, the Twelve Prophets, Psalms, Job, Proverbs, and some of the history books."[4] Suggestive of the full extent of the books he recognized is his statement that the Therapeutae privately study "the laws and the sacred oracles of God enunciated by the holy prophets, and hymns,

and psalms, and all kinds of other things by reason of which knowledge and piety are increased and brought to perfection."[5] These books may correspond to the books of the *Tanakh*; they at least appear to closely correspond, though we do not have enough information to make definitive statements.

The New Testament

The New Testament contains vast numbers of authoritative quotes from the Old Testament, though it does not quote the Old Testament exhaustively. Joshua, Judges, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Obadiah, Zephaniah, and Nahum are all not directly quoted in the New Testament, though the final three would technically have been considered part of the Twelve. On quotations alone, we are unable to provide a definitive list of what the Old Testament canon would have been at the time. And yet, when we read the New Testament, we find no indication that there was any doubt as to the extent of the Old Testament canon. When Jesus debated the Pharisees and Sadducees, he never once entered into a dispute about what was Scripture; he simply said, "it is written" and that was assumed to be the shared authority. He could accuse them, "You pore over the Scriptures because you presume that by them you possess eternal life. These are the very words that testify about Me" (John 5:39). The clearest indication that the Old Testament canon was considered to be complete during the time of Jesus is probably Luke's statement, "beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, [Jesus] explained to them what was written in all the Scriptures about Himself" (Luke 24:27). This was a completed corpus and it pointed to Christ.

It has sometimes been said that the Sadducees only accepted the Torah and rejected the rest of the Old Testament while the Pharisees accepted the whole; would that not indicate that the Scriptures were not so agreed upon at this time? The idea that the Sadducees had a different canon is likely a misreading of the evidence and likely a conflation with the Samaritans and the Samaritan Pentateuch. In reality, we have no contemporary indication that the Sadducees debated with the Pharisees over the extent of Scripture, but they rather only debated its interpretation.[6]

The New Testament contains some circumstantial evidence that the traditional ordering of the *Tanakh* was recognized by the time of Jesus. In speaking to the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus pronounces the following woe: "this generation will be charged with the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the foundation of the world, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, all of it will be charged to this generation." (Luke 11:50–51). It has been supposed that Jesus was here referring to the whole breadth of Hebrew Scriptures. Remember that, in the

ordering of the *Tanakh*, 2 Chronicles is the final book, rather than Malachi. In 2 Chronicles 24:20–22, we read of the martyrdom of Zechariah the son of Jehoiadah. If the ordering of the *Tanakh* was current, Jesus spoke of the first canonical martyr, Abel, in Genesis, and the last canonical martyr, Zechariah, in 2 Chronicles. We must note, however, that the parallel passage in Matthew 23:35 names Zechariah as the son of Berakiah, rather than Jehoiadah, which creates some potential issues for this interpretation, though there have been explanations provided for this discrepancy.[7] It is a circumstantial reading, but still suggestive.

As a final point, we must also acknowledge that the New Testament alludes to some books of the Apocrypha.[8] For example, Paul's language in Romans appears in places to be heavily influenced by similar concepts found in the Wisdom of Solomon. This is not to suggest that Paul used the Wisdom of Solomon authoritatively, but that he was familiar with the work and that he used language which he may have drawn from it. At no point in time in the New Testament do we see an authoritative quotation of any books from the Apocrypha, but we do see that they were likely known, being part of the air that Jews like the apostles breathed, thus they seem to have had some influence on the world and language of the writers of the New Testament.

The circumstantial evidence from the New Testament points to a closed canon—or at least one that was substantially completed. While the New Testament does not provide us a list or absolute certainty about the extent of the Old Testament canon, it gives us good indications that, for all intents and purposes, what was Scripture was a settled matter.

The Dead Sea Scrolls

Although we cannot make any firm statements about the extent of the canon that the Qumran community accepted, we can make some tentative deductions. From the caves around Qumran, fragments of all of the Old Testament books have been recovered, with the exception of Esther. This may or may not be significant; it is entirely possible that Esther was not accepted by the Qumran community—which would not be without precedent—or it may be that they used Esther, though no evidence of this survived to the present. We should be careful to not overstate the significance of finding remains of all of the Old Testament books, for of the approximately 930 manuscripts recovered, only about 206 or so are fragments of biblical books.[9] If we were to draw conclusions about the number of manuscripts recovered, we would also have to conclude that 1 Enoch and Jubilees were considered authoritative by the Qumran community due to how many of these manuscripts have survived. In fact, it is entirely possible that this was the case and it has been argued that this is the best reading of the evidence, though firm con-

clusions are uncertain.[10] The fragments recovered tell us that the books were used, but not what their opinion of the books was. For a better idea, we must rely upon the manner in which books are quoted in the other writings found at Qumran and whether commentaries were written on these books, though this evidence cannot tell us their views comprehensively. With this criteria, we can conclude that they accepted at least the Torah, Prophets, Psalms, and Proverbs, though we cannot be certain where the borders of the canon were nor whether the Qumran community accepted any books outside of the traditional Jewish canon. Even if it is found that the Qumran community accepted a wider canon—which seems quite possible—we must also remember that Qumran did not reflect the state of the Jewish community at large, as they are representative of a small separatist sect, not the vast majority of Jews. The fragmentary evidence at least shows basic agreement on the core of the Old Testament canon; any conclusion more than this is not yet warranted by the evidence.

The Apocrypha

Several passages from the Apocrypha assume what appears to be a definite collection of books that was authoritative for the writers. Sirach (also known as Ecclesiasticus or Ben Sira), a composition originally written by Ben Sira in Hebrew around 180 BC, contains several passages of note. Throughout chapters 44–50, the author "refers to events in the five books of Moses, Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings (with parallels from Chronicles and Isaiah), Jeremiah, Ezekiel, possibly Job, and the Twelve Minor Prophets."[11] Sometime after the original composition, Sirach was translated into Greek by Ben Sira's grandson, who added a prologue to the text which referred to his grandfather reading "the law and the prophets and the other books of our fathers"[12] (Sir. 1:1). The term "the law and the prophets" reflects the twofold terminology that we see in the New Testament, though what the "other books" is referring to is not entirely clear. Given the usage of books like Job and Chronicles that fall outside the category of prophets in the *Tanakh*, it is possible that this is a catchall term for other authoritative books. In any case, the core of the Old Testament is recognized, while the edges were perhaps fuzzy.

The slightly later book of 2 Maccabees gives hints of books being collected. We read of Jeremiah giving and teaching the law to the people (2:2–3), and then the text refers to Nehemiah collecting "the books about the kings and prophets, and the writings of David, and letters of kings about votive offerings" (2:14). A comparison is then made to Judas Maccabaeus, who "also collected all the books that had been lost on account of the war which had come upon us, and they are in our possession" (2:15). What these collections refer to is not clear, but it may be



Figure 5.2. The caves at Qumran where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered.

that the historical books, the prophetic books, and the Psalms are in view. More definite is the later mention of Judas Maccabaeus encouraging the people "from the law and the prophets" (15:9). While we do not know the exact contents of what was meant by "the law and the prophets," there was a definite collection of authoritative books known during the Maccabean period.

What the books of the Apocrypha point toward is perhaps not a completed canon, but a very definite core canon. Books on the periphery like Esther or Ecclesiastes may not have been widely regarded, but the Law and the Prophets made up an undisputed core. We can date this at worst to the early second century BC, and can most likely push this collection back into the third century given the testimony of Ben Sira.

The Old Testament

The internal testimony of the Old Testament gives us some small idea of when other books came to be seen as authoritative. We can say with certainty that the first part of the Old Testament to be viewed as authoritative was the Torah, the Law of Moses. This is due to its status as the earliest written revelation given to the

people of Israel, its character of being the very words of God, and its self-conscious understanding of authority, not to mention the fact that the other books of the Old Testament presuppose and authoritatively reference the Law. What form the Torah would have been in when it was first recognized we cannot say,[13] but it is evident from the other books of the Old Testament that the Law was regarded as authoritative from the time it was given. As we mentioned in Chapter 2, the whole unfolding of the historical books (Judges, 1–2 Samuel, 1–2 Kings) presupposes the authority of the Law. They certainly presuppose Deuteronomy and have often been dubbed the Deuteronomistic History. The theological explanation of Israel and Judah's exile is rooted in their covenant unfaithfulness and in the promised covenant curses for disobedience to the covenant, the stipulations of which were laid out in the Law of Moses. In addition to the general assumption of the Law's authority, its nature is revealed further in its public reading. As Roger Beckwith has noted, "The public reading of Old Testament books in worship seems to have been a result, not a cause, of their canonicity. Wherever the public reading of Old Testament material is recorded in the Old Testament itself, it is read because it embodies the law of God, not for some lesser reason."[14] This is evident before the exile in the public reading of the Law in the days of Josiah (2 Kings 23:1–3) and is evident after the exile as the Law is read and explained to the people by Ezra the priest (Neh. 8:1–8). The covenant itself was confirmed by Moses in the public reading of the Law to the people (Ex. 24:3–8).

While the Torah is the most pervasively recognized book in the Old Testament, there are several places that recognize earlier revelation: Zechariah refers back to the ministry of the former prophets (Zech. 1:4; 7:7), Jeremiah quotes and recognizes Micah's prophetic writings (Jer. 26:18; cf. Mic. 3:12), and Daniel found "in the books" the words of Jeremiah (Dan. 9:2). Some sort of knowledge of the prophets existed during this time, but we cannot say to what extent and when they were generally recognized and began to be collected.

The Extent of the Canon in Christian Sources

Shifting our attention from moving backward through the history of how the Jews viewed the extent of the canon, we will now move forward through Christian indications as to the extent of the Old Testament. As we will see in the following chapter, the Septuagint (LXX) played a large role in the introduction of the books of the Apocrypha into common usage in the church. Yet those church fathers who were familiar with the Jewish tradition noted a smaller corpus of books that excluded the Apocrypha. We should note, however, that because the LXX was the Bible of the Greek-speaking church, the additions found in the LXX were largely assumed even unconsciously.

The Bryennios List (mid-second century)

The Bryennios list is perhaps the earliest Christian list of Old Testament books. This list contains an arrangement of 27 books with their Hebrew and Greek titles that appears to correspond to only books included in the Hebrew canon, though there are some questions as to which books Esdras A and B refer to.[15]

Melito of Sardis (died c. 180)

Around the same time as the Byrennios List, we find Melito of Sardis listing the Old Testament books. In a letter to his friend Onesimus, he writes,

> Accordingly when I went East and came to the place where these things were preached and done, I learned accurately the books of the Old Testament, and send them to you as written below. Their names are as follows: Of Moses, five books: Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Leviticus, Deuteronomy; Jesus Nave, Judges, Ruth; of Kings, four books; of Chronicles, two; the Psalms of David, the Proverbs of Solomon, Wisdom also, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Job; of Prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah; of the twelve prophets, one book; Daniel, Ezekiel, Esdras. From which also I have made the extracts, dividing them into six books.[16]

Several notes are in order: Jesus Nave is Joshua; his reference to "Kings" encompasses 1–2 Samuel and 1–2 Kings; there is some ambiguity whether the reference to "Wisdom" is an alternative title to Proverbs or an inclusion of the Wisdom of Solomon;[17] and Esdras was an alternate title for Ezra and Nehemiah. Lacking from Melito's list is Esther, which we will find to be a common theme, but otherwise his list largely corresponds to the number of Old Testament books that we know, with the possible addition of the Wisdom of Solomon.

Origen of Alexandria (c. 184 – c. 253)

Origen was one of the few Greek-speaking Christians who was also familiar with the Hebrew language. He provides a list of the Old Testament books with both their Greek and Hebrew titles—the Greek titles are translated here while the Hebrew are not—and explicitly links the number 22 to the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet:

> It should be stated that the canonical books, as the Hebrews have handed them down, are twenty-two; corresponding with the number of their letters. … The twenty-two books of the Hebrews are the following: That which is called by us Genesis, but by the Hebrews, from the beginning of the book, *Bresith*, which means, 'In the beginning'; Exodus, *Welesmoth*, that is, 'These are the names'; Leviticus, *Wikra*, 'And he called'; Numbers, *Ammesphekodeim*; Deuteronomy, *Eleaddebareim*, 'These are the words'; Jesus, the son of Nave,

> *Josoue ben Noun*; Judges and Ruth, among them in one book, *Saphateim*; the First and Second of Kings, among them one, *Samouel*, that is, 'The called of God'; the Third and Fourth of Kings in one, *Wammelch David*, that is, 'The kingdom of David'; of the Chronicles, the First and Second in one, *Dabreïamein*, that is, 'Records of days'; Esdras, First and Second in one, *Ezra*, that is, 'An assistant'; the book of Psalms, *Spharthelleim*; the Proverbs of Solomon, *Meloth*; Ecclesiastes, *Koelth*; the Song of Songs (not, as some suppose, Songs of Songs), *Sir Hassirim*; Isaiah, *Jessia*; Jeremiah, with Lamentations and the epistle in one, *Jeremia*; Daniel, *Daniel*; Ezekiel, *Jezekiel*; Job, *Job*; Esther, *Esther*. And besides these there are the Maccabees, which are entitled *Sarbeth Sabanaiel*."[18]

Lacking from the list is the Book of the Twelve (the Minor Prophets), which was undoubtedly accidentally missed by Origen or has dropped out in the process of the transmission of the text. Though he mentions the books of the Maccabees, he marks them as outside of the 22 books. Aside from the appending of the Letter of Jeremiah to the book of Jeremiah—which shows influence from the LXX—and if we restore the lacking book of the Twelve, we have a list of 22 books that corresponds to those 39 we see in our Old Testament today.

Athanasius of Alexandria (c. 296 – 373)

The great bishop of Alexandria could speak no Hebrew, but we find him giving the same numbering of 22 in his 39th Festal Letter from the year 367 (of which we will have more to say later):

> There are, then, of the Old Testament, twenty-two books in number; for, as I have heard, it is handed down that this is the number of the letters among the Hebrews; their respective order and names being as follows. The first is Genesis, then Exodus, next Leviticus, after that Numbers, and then Deuteronomy. Following these there is Joshua, the son of Nun, then Judges, then Ruth. And again, after these four books of Kings, the first and second being reckoned as one book, and so likewise the third and fourth as one book. And again, the first and second of the Chronicles are reckoned as one book. Again Ezra, the first and second are similarly one book. After these there is the book of Psalms, then the Proverbs, next Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs. Job follows, then the Prophets, the twelve being reckoned as one book. Then Isaiah, one book, then Jeremiah with Baruch, Lamentations, and the epistle, one book; afterwards, Ezekiel and Daniel, each one book. Thus far constitutes the Old Testament.[19]

Athanasius's testimony shows again the influence of the LXX, as he notes that Baruch, Lamentations, and the Epistle of Jeremiah are all appended to the book

of Jeremiah. His list also lacks Esther; he actually considers that book to be a member of the books of the Apocrypha. Still, the core of the Old Testament canon is very consistent.

Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 313 – 386)

Cyril lists 22 books, and he does so in the context of teaching catechumens what was the extent of the Old Testament:

> Of these read the twenty-two books, but have nothing to do with the apocryphal writings. Study earnestly these only which we read openly in the church. Far wiser and more pious than you were the Apostles, and the bishops of old time, the rulers of the church who handed down these books. Being therefore a child of the church, do not infringe upon its statutes. And of the Old Testament, as we have said, study the twenty-two books, which, if you are desirous of learning, strive to remember by name, as I recite them. For of the Law, the books of Moses, are the first five, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. And next, Joshua the son of Nave, and the book of Judges, including Ruth, counted as seventh. And of the other historical books, the first and second books of the Kings are among the Hebrews one book; also the third and fourth one book. And in like manner, the first and second of Chronicles are with them one book; and the first and second of Esdras are counted one. Esther is the twelfth book; and these are the Historical writings. But those which are written in verses are five, Job, and the book of Psalms, and Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs, which is the seventeenth book. And after these come the five Prophetic books: of the Twelve Prophets one book, of Isaiah one, of Jeremiah one, including Baruch, and Lamentations, and the Epistle; then Ezekiel, and the Book of Daniel, the twenty-second book of the Old Testament.[20]

Cyril's listing of the books of the Old Testament largely coincides with the standard Jewish canon. He uses the LXX, and so he includes Baruch and the Epistle of Jeremiah as appended to the book of Jeremiah. There is also some slight ambiguity as to the identity of 1 and 2 Esdras, as it is unclear whether this includes Ezra and Nehemiah combined into a single work (1 Esdras) along with another book (2 Esdras), or if he has the Greek versions of Ezra and Nehemiah in mind going by these titles.

Jerome (c. 342 – 420)

Last, but most certainly not least in our survey of Christian sources is Jerome. Jerome was the greatest scholar of his day, being familiar with Latin, Greek, and

Hebrew. He is best known as the principal translator of what would come to be known as the Vulgate. Being also familiar with Hebrew, he provides a list in a similar fashion to Origen with the Hebrew names included:

> As, then, there are twenty-two elementary characters by means of which we write in Hebrew all we say, and the compass of the human voice is contained within their limits, so we reckon twenty-two books, by which, as by the alphabet of the doctrine of God, a righteous man is instructed in tender infancy, and, as it were, while still at the breast.
>
> The first of these books is called *Bresith*, to which we give the name Genesis. The second, *Elle Smoth*, which bears the name Exodus; the third, *Vaiecra*, that is Leviticus; the fourth, *Vaiedabber*, which we call Numbers; the fifth, *Elle Addabarim*, which is entitled Deuteronomy. These are the five books of Moses, which they properly call *Thorath*, that is *law*.
>
> The second class is composed of the Prophets, and they begin with *Jesus* the son of Nave, who among them is called Joshua the son of Nun. Next in the series is *Sophtim*, that is the book of Judges; and in the same book they include Ruth, because the events narrated occurred in the days of the Judges. Then comes Samuel, which we call First and Second Kings. The fourth is *Malachim*, that is, Kings, which is contained in the third and fourth volumes of Kings. And it is far better to say *Malachim*, that is Kings, than *Malachoth*, that is Kingdoms. For the author does not describe the Kingdoms of many nations, but that of one people, the people of Israel, which is comprised in the twelve tribes. The fifth is Isaiah, the sixth, Jeremiah, the seventh, Ezekiel, the eighth is the book of the Twelve Prophets, which is called among the Jews *Thare Asra*.
>
> To the third class belong the *Hagiographa*, of which the first book begins with Job, the second with David, whose writings they divide into five parts and comprise in one volume of Psalms; the third is Solomon, in three books, Proverbs, which they call *Parables*, that is *Masaloth*, Ecclesiastes, that is *Coeleth*, the Song of Songs, which they denote by the title *Sir Assirim*; the sixth is Daniel; the seventh, *Dabre Aiamim*, that is, *Words of Days*, which we may more expressively call a chronicle of the whole of the sacred history, the book that amongst us is called First and Second Chronicles; the eighth, Ezra, which itself is likewise divided amongst Greeks and Latins into two books; the ninth is Esther.
>
> And so there are also twenty-two books of the Old Testament; that is, five of Moses, eight of the prophets, nine of the *Hagiographa*, though some include Ruth and *Kinoth* (Lamentations) amongst the *Hagiographa*, and think that these books ought to be reckoned separately; we should thus have twenty-four books of the old law.[21]

Jerome notes the two different numbering conventions, 22 and 24, and explains how these are reached. He also here recognizes the threefold divisions that by then had become customary among the Jews. We will cease our survey here, noting that, when reference was made to the Jewish canon, there is consistent mention of the numbers 22 or 24 and that the books listed are largely consistent with some small variations.

Summary

What then are we to make of our survey? A clear list of the Old Testament canon from a Jewish source perhaps comes surprisingly late. Though the list is late, we can very strongly infer that these books were held to be authoritative for quite some time before the list was written. Christian sources, when giving a number, agree with the numbering of 22 or 24 books, which we find in both Josephus and in 4 Esdras. If we take Josephus at his word, the Old Testament canon had been established for several centuries and was widely agreed upon by the Jews. This is exactly the situation we find amongst the Jews in the time of Jesus: there was no apparent debate over the extent of Scripture and Jesus could declare that the Scriptures—since everyone apparently knew what that term meant—pointed to him. From the available evidence we have, the extent of the canon seems to have been largely established sometime in the third or second century BC, even if Esther seems to float uncertainly around the edges.

When Was the Canon Closed?

While we have established that the canon reached its full extent at least one or two hundred years before the time of Jesus, we have not yet established the question of when the canon was closed. When would it have been settled that no more books could be added to the canon of Scripture? A very common assertion is that the Old Testament was closed by the Jews at the Council of Jamnia (also called Jabneh or Yavneh) around the year 90 AD. This notion comes fraught with problems, for it is most likely completely inappropriate to speak of 1) a closing of the canon; and of 2) a council that could authoritatively rule on matters pertaining to the whole of Judaism. As Emanuel Tov summarizes the situation:

> It is often claimed that at the end of the 1st century CE important decisions were reached at an official meeting devoted to the authoritative status of the twenty-four books of the Hebrew Bible. In this context, various scholars mentioned a meeting or council that was held at *Jabneh*, Jamnia, between 75 and 117 CE. However, we possess no evidence for such an official meeting. In the ancient texts, we only find references to a *beth din*, "law court," a *metibta*, "academy," a *yeshivah*, and a *beth midrash* ("school" or

> "college") at Jabneh, and not a convention or council. According to Leiman, the only decision reached at Jabneh was that "the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes render the hands unclean" (m. Yad. 3.5), that is, these books were given authoritative status. No decision was taken on the authoritative (canonical) status of all of the biblical books and there is no evidence regarding whether the activities of the rabbis at Jabneh had any influence on the status of the text during that period.[22]

The only real question that arises from this period, whether there ever was a "Council" at Jamnia or not, is regarding disagreement amongst the rabbis over whether two books, Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes, "defile the hands." Only books that were holy could be said to defile the hands, so the question was whether these should truly be considered holy. Or to put it another way, the question was not what should be added to the canon, but whether Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs should continue to be kept within it; the rabbis ultimately kept the status quo. This hardly constitutes a "closing" of the Old Testament canon, but simply a final Jewish disputation about the edges of the canon.

If the canon was not closed at Jamnia, then when was it? The survey we have just done indicates that, for all intents and purposes, it was closed sometime in the third or second century BC. But we can probably make an assumption beyond the circumstantial evidence we have. First, we cite again Josephus: "It is true, our history has been written since Artaxerxes very particularly, but has not been esteemed of the same authority with the former by our forefathers, because there has not been an exact succession of prophets since that time."[23] There has not been a succession of prophets, so the writings that came after the time of Artaxerxes were not esteemed as highly. We find earlier indications that the time of the prophets was recognized to have ended—perhaps not permanently—during the life of the authors. We see in 1 Maccabees the statement, "So there was great distress in Israel, the worst since the time when prophets ceased to appear among them" (1 Macc. 9:27). And it says further, "The Jews and their priests have resolved that Simon should be their leader and high priest forever, until a trustworthy prophet should arise" (1 Macc. 14:41). Add to this Ben Sira's reference around c. 180 BC to a definite collection of the Law and the Prophets plus the other books, and the implication is that no other authoritative books were to be added. Given the testimony of Josephus that the succession of prophets was not continued through this period, the earlier testimony of 1 Maccabees that the time of the prophets had ceased, and the usage of the Law and the Prophets in Ben Sira's day, it would seem that the Old Testament canon, for all intents and purposes, was effectively closed by the second century BC, if not earlier. While we

cannot date a conscious or official "closing of the canon" of the Old Testament to any specific time period, the evidence we possess suggests that it functionally occurred sometime during this period, with the possible exception of Esther, which drops in and out of Christian canon lists. Whether the canon of the Old Testament was consciously deemed to be fully complete this early, we cannot say for sure, though it seems that its contents were essentially solidified by the time of the writing of the New Testament.

Conclusion

Protestants have adopted the Jewish canon of the Old Testament, which is what was recognized by the Jews as authoritative before, during, and after the time of Jesus and the apostles. Though the edges of the canon may be a little fuzzy, especially when it comes to Esther, the main outline is firmly in place and a definite collection of writings is assumed by "the Law and the Prophets" and "the Scriptures" by the time we reach the writings of the New Testament. Though an enumerated list of the books of the Old Testament is late, we can work backward with a high degree of confidence that the canon had been in such a form for quite some time before the list was made. Our story with the Old Testament amongst Christians, however, is not quite so simple. As we will see in the next chapter, though the extent of the Jewish canon was recognized by those who were familiar with it, additional books came into wide usage in the church, and those books continue to spark debate down to the present day. To the question of the Apocrypha, we turn in the next chapter.

Further Reading

Beckwith, Roger. *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1985.

Bruce, F. F. *The Canon of Scripture*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1988.

6.
The Apocrypha

When Protestants think of the books of the Apocrypha—also called the deuterocanonical books[1]—they might think of them as those strange books that Roman Catholics have as part of their Old Testament and which they use to support doctrines like purgatory and prayers for the dead. What Protestants often do not realize is that the Apocrypha has had a long life within the church, and it is only relatively recently that they have played little to no role amongst English-speaking Protestants. It is in fact a recent phenomenon, even in Protestant circles, for printed Bibles to commonly have no Apocrypha included, a fact that may be surprising. Given the relatively recent removal of these books from printed Bibles, what then are Protestants to make of them today? We shall argue that though the Apocrypha has enjoyed long usage in the church, Protestants are right to reject them as authoritative Scripture on the basis that they are not part of the Scriptures that were entrusted to the Jews. We will also give some consideration as to what role these books should play for Protestants in the present.

The Influence of the Septuagint on the Canon

From the very earliest days of the church, the church had a Bible. This Bible even existed before the New Testament was written and compiled. This Bible was the Old Testament. As we saw in the previous chapter, the Jewish canon of the Old Testament was well established by the time of Jesus and the apostles, and this collection of books was accepted as authoritative by all early Christians. As the gospel

spread out from Jerusalem, more and more Gentiles entered into the church, meaning more and more members of the church were unable to understand Hebrew. Enter the Septuagint.

The Septuagint—usually abbreviated LXX—was the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. The word "Septuagint" comes to us from the Latin *septuaginta*, which means "seventy"—hence the Roman numeral abbreviation of LXX. It gained its name from the legend that surrounds the history of its translation. According to the second-century BC *Letter of Aristeas*, King Ptolemy II of Alexandria sought to have the Torah translated into Greek, and so he gathered 72 translators to himself in Alexandria, six from each tribe of Israel. Each of them worked separately within their own rooms, and when they were done, they found that each one of their translations matched exactly with that of the others (which would be a true miracle indeed!). Two of the translators from the legend were dropped in a later tradition,[2] and the translation came to be known as "The Translation of the Seventy" and has entered our common parlance as the Septuagint. While the account is legendary, the basic facts are likely true. There was a large Jewish population in Alexandria in the third century BC and these translations were probably done in that region. The Torah translation is presumed to have been completed around 280 BC, while the rest of the Old Testament was probably completed by 100 BC, giving Greek-speaking Jews the Scriptures in their own language.

When the gospel went out to the Gentiles, it was the LXX that these Greek-speaking believers inherited. Many of the citations of the Old Testament by New Testament writers in fact come from the LXX. The significance that the adoption of the LXX has for the history of the Old Testament canon is that other books were translated and included alongside the Old Testament writings. These books are Tobit, Judith, Baruch, Sirach (also known as Ecclesiasticus or Ben Sira), 1–2 Maccabees, and the Wisdom of Solomon, which are used in the Roman Catholic tradition, along with Psalm 151, 1 Esdras, the Prayer of Manasseh, and 3 Maccabees, which are used in the Eastern Orthodox tradition. Included are additions to the book of Daniel (the Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men, Susanna, and Bel and the Dragon), along with additions to the Greek version of Esther. It has been presumed on this basis that there existed in Alexandria a wider canon, known as the Alexandrian canon, though there is no convincing evidence for this wider canon amongst the Jews. While we are not entirely sure why the books were placed together, what is certain is that these additional books made their way into common Christian usage, and as Christians and Jews diverged and knowledge of the Scriptures in Hebrew was largely lost, these addi-

tional books came into increasing undifferentiated use amongst the books of the Old Testament

Contributing further to the establishment of these additional books was the widespread opinion among Christians that the LXX's Greek text was superior to the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, an opinion solidified further by the conviction that the LXX itself was inspired. The legend found in the *Letter of Aristeas* was accepted by Christians and was regarded as evidence of the LXX's inspiration. We find the legend repeated by Justin Martyr[3] (c. 100 – c. 165 AD), who viewed the LXX as superior and even accused the Jews of corrupting the Hebrew text where the Hebrew differed from the Greek.[4] The legend was also repeated by Irenaeus of Lyons[5] (c. 130 – c. 202) and Clement of Alexandria[6] (c. 150 – c. 215), who both attributed inspiration to the Greek translation itself. This conviction continues down to the present for the Eastern Orthodox.[7] Given the high degree of respect for the LXX, it should be little wonder that additional books that accompanied it would have been respected as well.

The Apocrypha in the Church

Though the Septuagint was widely used and highly regarded, it is some time before we see authority being granted to the books of the Apocrypha. While early Christian writers allude to some of the books of the Apocrypha, they are not unambiguously cited authoritatively until Clement of Alexandria at the end of the second century.[8] Authoritative citations are not uncommon during the third century and afterwards. We have earlier noted that Origen recognized that the Jews had a 22-book canon, but we also find that while he freely acknowledged that the Jews did not accept books of the Apocrypha like Tobit or Judith, he says that the churches, to the contrary, use them.[9] In this sense, these books were seen as something of an inheritance of the church regardless of Jewish opinion.

The influence of the Septuagint did not only extend to the Greek-speaking Eastern Church but also to the Latin-speaking Western Church. The earliest translations of the Old Testament into Latin—called the Old Latin—were not based on the Hebrew, but on the Greek LXX, thus the extra books found in the LXX made their way into the Latin-speaking tradition as well. By the third century, we find various figures quoting from the Apocrypha with the same citation formulas as they would use for the books of the Old Testament.[10] The most famous and perhaps most influential defender of the church's acceptance of the Apocrypha was Augustine of Hippo. He used the books of the Apocrypha and "frequently quoted them as though they were not different from the canonical books of the Old Testament."[11] We see this reflected in his listing of the Old Testament books:

> Now the whole canon of Scripture on which we say this judgment is to be exercised, is contained in the following books:—Five books of Moses, that is, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy; one book of Joshua the son of Nun; one of Judges; one short book called Ruth, which seems rather to belong to the beginning of Kings; next, four books of Kings, and two of Chronicles, these last not following one another, but running parallel, so to speak, and going over the same ground. The books now mentioned are history, which contains a connected narrative of the times, and follows the order of the events. There are other books which seem to follow no regular order, and are connected neither with the order of the preceding books nor with one another, such as Job, and Tobias, and Esther, and Judith, and the two books of Maccabees, and the two of Ezra, which last look more like a sequel to the continuous regular history which terminates with the books of Kings and Chronicles. Next are the Prophets, in which there is one book of the Psalms of David; and three books of Solomon, viz., Proverbs, Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes. For two books, one called Wisdom and the other Ecclesiasticus, are ascribed to Solomon from a certain resemblance of style, but the most likely opinion is that they were written by Jesus the son of Sirach. Still they are to be reckoned among the prophetical books, since they have attained recognition as being authoritative. The remainder are the books which are strictly called the Prophets: twelve separate books of the prophets which are connected with one another, and having never been disjoined, are reckoned as one book; the names of these prophets are as follows:—Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi; then there are the four greater prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezekiel. The authority of the Old Testament is contained within the limits of these forty-four books.[12]

Though the Apocrypha came to be widely used and accepted in the church, opinion was not fully unified. Differences existed between East and West in their usage of the Apocrypha. In the East, the Apocrypha was generally afforded a lower status, with Metzger noting, "from the fourth century onward, the Greek Fathers made fewer and fewer references to the Apocrypha as inspired" and the books were excluded from several Eastern fathers' canon lists of the Old Testament.[13] The matter was more uniform in the West, though there was one very significant figure who differed in this respect: Jerome. In his translation of the Old Testament, Jerome worked from the Hebrew rather than the Greek. This knowledge led him to recognize that the books of the Apocrypha were not part of the Hebrew Scriptures and had never been accepted by the Jews. We have seen in the previous

chapter that he enumerated the Old Testament according to the Jewish numbering of the canon, and did not include the Apocrypha as part of the canon. While he recognized that the books were used in the church, in his opinion, they were of a different quality than the universally accepted canonical books. They should be received in the churches, but not on par with the books of the Jewish canon. In his preface to the *Books of Solomon*, Jerome says,

> There circulates also the 'all-virtuous' Wisdom of Jesus the son of Sira, together with a similar work, the pseudepigraph entitled the Wisdom of Solomon. The former of these I have also found in Hebrew, entitled not 'Ecclesiasticus,' as among the Latins, but 'Parables'. … The latter is nowhere found among the Hebrews: its very style smacks of Greek eloquence, and several ancient writers affirm it to be the work of Philo the Jew. Therefore as the church indeed reads Judith, Tobit, and the books of Maccabees, but does not receive them among the canonical books, so let it also read these two volumes for the edification of the people but not for establishing the authority of ecclesiastical dogma.[14]

Jerome was not the only person to make such a distinction between the universally accepted books and the Apocrypha, nor was he the first. Athanasius of Alexandria in 367 had earlier made a similar functional difference when enumerating the canon in his 39th Festal Letter, which we have had occasion to quote partially above. Concerning the Apocrypha, he writes,

> But for greater exactness I add this also, writing of necessity; that there are other books besides these not indeed included in the Canon, but appointed by the Fathers to be read by those who newly join us, and who wish for instruction in the word of godliness. The Wisdom of Solomon, and the Wisdom of Sirach, and Esther, and Judith, and Tobit, and that which is called the Teaching of the Apostles, and the Shepherd. But the former, my brethren, are included in the Canon, the latter being [merely] read.[15]

There is a difference between the fully canonical books, which he had earlier listed in his letter, and these additional books which are read in the churches. These are not counted as authoritative, but they are for instruction and moral training. Though Athanasius made this formal distinction, however, Bruce notes that Athanasius in practice made little difference between the canonical books and those others that were useful for instruction, such that he "quoted from them freely, often with the same introductory formulae—'as it is written', 'as the scripture says', etc."[16]

While various church councils—Rome (382), Hippo (393), and Carthage (397/419)—affirmed the usage of the Apocrypha as part of the Old Testament,

these were not considered to be ecumenical councils and so they did not establish a universal decision. On into the Middle Ages, notable figures in the West such as Pope Gregory the Great (c. 540 – 604),[17] the Venerable Bede (672 – 735),[18] and John of Damascus (c. 675 – 749)[19] continued to follow the numbering of the Hebrew canon or to make a distinction between the canonical books and those that were useful for edification. This distinction continues down to the present amongst the Eastern Orthodox.[20] It was not until the Council of Trent (1546) that the Roman Catholic Church officially affirmed the Apocrypha as fully authoritative and part of the Old Testament canon.

The Reformation and Beyond

During the Reformation, Protestants rejected the authority of the Apocrypha, holding it to not be of the same authority as the canonical books. At the Leipzig Disputation in 1519, Martin Luther came up against the issue of offering prayers for the dead during his dispute with Johann von Eck. As Scriptural support, Eck put forward 2 Maccabees 12:43–45, to which Luther made the same distinction as Jerome had done earlier: Second Maccabees belonged to a collection of books that could not be used for establishing doctrine.[21] Basing doctrine on Scripture alone was thus not violated, for 2 Maccabees could not rightly be considered Scripture, and thus had no bearing in doctrinal disputes. Protestants have almost universally followed Luther's lead in giving no authority to the Apocrypha.

The Protestant position and that of some Roman Catholic scholars were initially not that far off and were not inherently at odds with each other. It was the Council of Trent that solidified the break between Protestants and Roman Catholics in their views of the extent of the Old Testament canon. The Council officially included the books of the Apocrypha alongside those of the Hebrew canon and declared an anathema upon any who would not receive these books:

> If anyone does not accept as sacred and canonical the aforesaid books in their entirety and with all their parts, as they have been accustomed to be read in the Catholic Church and as they are contained in the old Latin Vulgate Edition, and knowingly and deliberately rejects the aforesaid traditions, let him be anathema.[22]

This decree effectively made any reconciliation or discussion between Roman Catholics and Protestants over the extent of the Scriptures impossible. Given this strong statement, it may perhaps be surprising to hear that certain figures just prior to the Reformation and even after its outbreak followed Jerome's distinction between the authority of the canonical books and the Apocrypha. As Metzger has commented, "Subsequent to Jerome's time and down to the period of the Refor-

mation, a continuous succession of the more learned fathers and theologians in the West maintained the distinctive and unique authority of the books of the Hebrew canon."[23] Among these may be counted Cardinal Francisco Ximénes de Cisneros (1436 – 1517), who in a prologue to his *Complutensian Polyglot* (which we will see again in Chapter 14), spoke of the Apocrypha as "books outside the canon, which the church accepts more for the edification of the people than for the sanctioned authority of church doctrine."[24] Cardinal Thomas Cajetan (1469 – 1534), one of Luther's theological opponents, had written in 1532 a commentary upon the books of the Old Testament, though he did not comment upon the Apocrypha. He explained his reasons for this as follows:

> Here we close our commentaries on the historical books of the Old Testament. For the rest (that is, Judith, Tobit, and the books of Maccabees) are counted by St Jerome out of the canonical books, and are placed amongst the Apocrypha, along with Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus, as is plain from the Prologus Galeatus. Nor be disturbed, like a raw scholar, if you should find anywhere, either in the sacred councils or the sacred doctors, these books reckoned as canonical. For the words as well of councils as of doctors are to be reduced to the correction of Jerome. Now, according to his judgment, in the epistle to the bishops Chromatius and Heliodorus, these books (and any other like books in the canon of the Bible) are not canonical, that is, not in the nature of a rule for confirming matters of faith. Yet, they may be called canonical, that is, in the nature of a rule for the edification of the faithful, as being received and authorised in the canon of the Bible for that purpose. By the help of this distinction you may see you way clearly through that which Augustine says, and what is written in the provincial council of Carthage."[25]

Trent settled the matter as far as the Roman Catholic Church was concerned, and it would seem that Luther had settled it for Protestants, but the Apocrypha continued to live on in Protestant circles with varying degrees of approval. While Luther plainly rejected the authority of the Apocrypha, he included them in his translation of the Bible into German. In his introduction to the Apocrypha, he wrote, "These are books that, though not equal to the Holy Scriptures, are still both useful and good to read."[26] The Geneva Bible's (1560) introduction to the Apocrypha declares that they do not "serve to prove any point of Christian religion," but "as books proceeding from godly men, were received to be read for the advancement and furtherance of the knowledge of the history, and for the instruction of godly manners." The Belgic Confession (1561) allowed for the church to read and learn from the Apocrypha so far as they agreed with the canonical books,

but did not allow for them any authority in doctrinal matters (Article 6). The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Anglican Church (1571) also permitted the usage of the Apocrypha: "And the other Books (as Jerome saith) the Church doth read for example of life and instruction of manners; but yet doth it not apply them to establish any doctrine" (Article 6). Not all concessions are quite so positive, as not everyone approved of the usage of the Apocrypha in church. Puritans in England especially objected to their usage. We see this reflected in the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647): "The books commonly called Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are no part of the canon of the Scripture; and therefore are of no authority in the Church of God, nor to be any otherwise approved, or made use of, than other human writings" (1.3). It is this general opinion found in the Westminster Confession of Faith which has held more long-term sway in the English-speaking world.

Today, we would not expect to find the Apocrypha included in our Bibles. We might actually be hard-pressed to find a Bible with the Apocrypha if we even wanted to find one. This was not the case with printed Protestant Bibles for about three hundred years. In his German translation of the Bible, Luther included the Apocrypha, though he set them in a separate category. Almost all other Protestant translations followed suit and placed the Apocrypha in between the Old and New Testament, to include the 1560 Geneva Bible and the 1611 King James Version. It was completely normal for Bibles to include the Apocrypha until the early 1800s, though disputes about the propriety of including it were not uncommon before then. When the British Bible Society adopted the policy that they would no longer circulate the Bible with the Apocrypha in 1826, a turning point was reached.[27] Not only did this decision fit with the theological ideals of those who rejected the Apocrypha, but it was also more economical for printers. This period established the norm that we now know and have come to expect: the Apocrypha has no part in the vast majority of printed English Bibles.

The Theological Challenge of Rejection of the Apocrypha

From a purely historical perspective, the Apocrypha has been part of the Bible in the church longer than it has not been a part of it. Please note that I make a distinction here between being canonical and being a part of the Bible. The Apocrypha was functionally canonical for much of the church for about 1300 years, though even when it ceased to function as canonical for Protestants, it remained within printed copies of the Bible. The historical reality of the usage of the Apocrypha raises potential questions and challenges for evangelical Protestants: Is it right to reject the Apocrypha? Did Protestants really remove books from the canon? How is rejecting the Apocrypha consistent with the principle of

sola scriptura—that Scripture alone is the highest authority? This final question is perhaps the most significant and most potentially problematic for Protestants.

It has sometimes been argued that we can tell what the Old Testament canon was simply by appealing to what the New Testament quotes. Since the New Testament never authoritatively quotes any books of the Apocrypha, then they were not considered to be canonical by the apostles. This reasoning, however, would leave us in something of a ditch when it comes to the canon of the Old Testament. As Metzger points out, "it is also true that nowhere in the NT is there a direct quotation from the canonical books of Joshua, Judges, Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Obadiah, Zephaniah and Nahum; and New Testament allusions to them are few in number."[28] While we want to make our appeal to the New Testament, this is one manner of reasoning that is not sound, for it would lead us to have a much diminished Old Testament.

We have laid out the historical record of why Protestants look to those specific 39 books of the Jewish canon, but we must also set some theological parameters to understand why we Protestants are not standing as an authority over Scripture in making judgments concerning the Apocrypha. As we have seen in the historical record, the opinions of the church concerning the authority of the Apocrypha are somewhat mixed, though it plainly played a part in the life of the church and, to some extent, in the development of doctrine during the Middle Ages. To appeal to historical vicissitudes alone constitutes an appeal to one traditional authority against another; some criteria must be used for assessing the validity of one over the other. To Scripture we then appeal.

It is in the text of Scripture that we find our authoritative principle by which we may assess whether Protestants have rightly or wrongly rejected the canonical status of the Apocrypha. In 2 Timothy 3:16, Paul asserts that "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for instruction, for conviction, for correction, and for training in righteousness." While this text has been applied to the New Testament, what Paul refers to as "God-breathed" are the Scriptures of the Old Testament. Our standard for the Old Testament canon is thus what Paul had in mind when he refers to God-breathed Scriptures. What collection of books did Paul mean when he spoke of these Scriptures?

James White has argued that some of the Protestant difficulties concerning the principle of *sola scriptura* and determining the extent of the canon stem from canon being viewed separately from Scripture. He insists instead that, rather than separating them, we should see that the "canon is a *function* of Scripture, or, to be more specific, it is a *result* of the inspiration of Scripture itself. It is not an object of revelation *separate* from Scripture, but is revealed *and defined* by God's action of

inspiration."[29] He bases this on the principle found in 2 Timothy 3:16 that all Scripture is breathed out by God:

> The canon is not just a listing of books; it is a statement about what is *inspired*. The canon flows from the work of the Author of Scripture, God himself. To speak of canon outside of speaking of what is "God-breathed" is to speak nonsense. Canon is not made by man. Canon is made by God. It is the result of the action of His divine inspiration. That which is "God-breathed" is canon; that which is not "God-breathed" is not canon. It's just that simple.[30]

This is where Kruger's distinction between a functional and an ontological canon is helpful in theologically assessing the authority of the Apocrypha. What is God-breathed is ontologically canonical; what is not God-breathed is not ontologically canonical, though it may function as canonical. The Apocrypha certainly was functionally canonical for long swathes of the history of the church, but the real question is whether it is ontologically canonical. If it is shown that the Apocrypha is God-breathed, then all believers holding Scripture as the highest authority must unhesitatingly accept these writings; yet if they are not God-breathed, then they cannot be placed on the level of Scripture.

As we saw in the previous chapter, Protestants follow the Jewish canon of the Old Testament, rather than accepting the authority of the additional books that entered church usage through the LXX. What was the reason that we prefer the smaller Jewish canon? Because it is the Jews who were "entrusted with the oracles of God" (Rom. 3:2). In other words, they were given the Word of God, what we would commonly refer to as the Old Testament. The theological significance for the canon is such that, if what is God-breathed is canonical, and if the Jews were entrusted with God's words, then what they were entrusted with is what is canonical. The concern is not with what the church later adopted, but with what the Jews were entrusted with, with what Paul had in mind when he referred to the oracles of God, with what he said was God-breathed, and with what Jesus had in mind when he said, "Everything must be fulfilled that is written about Me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms" (Luke 24:44). If our understanding of the Hebrew canon is correct in the previous chapter, then we are on solid theological and Scriptural ground in affirming only those 39 books as God-breathed and authoritative.

So if the Apocrypha is not authoritative, what then should we do with it? It would not be unwise to recognize that it has played a role in the devotional life of the church and that it would not be wrong for it to continue to do so. We Protestants have treated certain books in much the same way as the Apocrypha was treated in the past. Most notable is probably John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress,* and

I would contend that we have done something similar in more recent memory with books by C. S. Lewis, such as his *Mere Christianity* or *The Weight of Glory*. We treat these books as almost a second canon of devotional literature and gain great insights into the Christian life from them.

An anecdote from the life of John Bunyan may help bring the Apocrypha into perspective. In his spiritual autobiography, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, Bunyan recounts how, at a spiritual low point, this passage suddenly came upon his mind: "Look at the generations of old, and see; did ever any trust in God, and were confounded?" These words greatly encouraged him, and he thus set about to read through from the whole of Genesis to Revelation to see if these words rang true. He also desired to find this passage, as he was certain that it must be found somewhere in the pages of Scripture. Yet, for a whole year, he could not find it anywhere, until at last he looked in the Apocrypha and found the words there in Sirach 2:10. I will let Bunyan finish the story in his own words:

> This at the first did somewhat daunt me, but because by this time I had more experience of the love and kindness of God, it troubled me less, especially when I considered that though it was not in those texts that we call holy and canonical, yet as much as this sentence was the sum and substance of many of the promises, it was my duty to take comfort in it. I bless God for that word, for it was of good to me. That word does still many times shine before my face.[31]

The words were not Scripture, but they were in accord with Scripture and brought comfort to his soul. Rather than being suspicious of these books and only viewing them as supporting Roman Catholic doctrine, perhaps Bunyan's perspective would be more helpful. While they may not be wholly doctrinally sound in all points, we rarely bat an eye if we find something useful or that stirs the imagination in Lewis's works like *The Great Divorce* or *The Chronicles of Narnia*, even though they are not perfect theologically. Perhaps that is the best way to view the Apocrypha today. Perhaps we would also do well to follow the old examples of Jerome and Athanasius and consider them useful for moral instruction, much as we do a book like *Pilgrim's Progress*.

An Aside Concerning the Book of Enoch

When I have addressed the topic of the canon of the Old Testament, inevitably a question arises concerning the Book of Enoch. What happened to this book? Should it be part of the canon? Because I have no better place to address the topic, I do so briefly here as an aside.

The Book of Enoch is a pseudepigraphal work; that is, it is a writing which falsely claims its author. It dates to approximately the third or second century BC.

It is comprised of five parts, which may have been composed at different times. The Book of Enoch is also known as 1 Enoch, as there are later works known as 2 Enoch, which has survived in Slavonic, and a 3 Enoch, which has survived in Hebrew. When someone asks about the Book of Enoch, they almost always mean 1 Enoch.

What often draws attention to this book is the fact that Jude quotes 1 Enoch 1:9 (see Jude 14–15). This one citation notwithstanding, there is only a small minority who ever appear to have considered it to be authoritative on par with Scripture. The earliest figures may have been from the Qumran community. There are strong indications that they viewed at least 1 Enoch to be authoritative, along with Jubilees and possibly their Community Rule, though this is not certain.[32] Other than this idiosyncratic minority Jewish group, we know of no other Jews according it any authority and it was never included in the collection of the *Tanakh*. Amongst Christian literature, we find the author of the Epistle of Barnabas quoting 1 Enoch as Scripture.[33] The most notable figure to argue that 1 Enoch should be regarded as authoritative was Tertullian, who did so on the basis of its quotation in Jude.[34] Of all Jewish and Christian groups, the only one who has clearly and continually granted the book any authority has been the Ethiopian Church, which has the widest biblical canon of all Christian traditions at 81 books. We know the whole of the text 1 Enoch only through the Ge'ez translation that has been preserved by the Ethiopian church, though we have fragments from other languages, including early Hebrew fragments from the Dead Sea Scrolls.

So what then do we do with the Book of Enoch, especially in light of Jude's citation of it? We recognize first the limitations regarding quotations as determining a book's status; a lack of quotation does not disqualify a book, and neither does a quotation necessarily qualify it as authoritative. Second, we acknowledge that there have been several ways to understand Jude's citation here. The first is the opinion that Jude simply considered it authoritative.[35] Others believe that 1 Enoch preserves a true prophecy handed down through the ages orally and preserved in a pseudepigraphal book, which Jude validates and quotes.[36] Finally, there is the view that Jude used the book in a customary fashion because it was known and respected by his Jewish audience and communicated something true, though he does not accord the work specific authority. I am partial to the last view, but I will let the reader determine how best to resolve the difficulty. My own judgment in the matter is to recognize that 1 Enoch is not an inspired or authoritative book and has never functioned as such for any large number of Jews or Christians. We should approach it as a book that gives us a window into Jewish interpretation and the messianic hope, but not as one that gives us deeper insights into Genesis or any authoritative revelations.

Conclusion

Protestants have 39 books in the Old Testament, Roman Catholics have 46. This is the greatest controversy that exists over the extent of the canon. The Apocrypha entered into widespread usage in the church through its adoption of the Septuagint, such that the lines became blurred between additions not found in the Hebrew text. Yet they were never fully blurred; church fathers such as Jerome recognized the distinction between the Hebrew canon and those other books that had come into common usage, which is one of the main reasons we can speak of a difference between the Apocrypha and the universally accepted books of the Old Testament.

The books of the Apocrypha have had a very long place in the life of the church, even well after the Reformation. While Protestants have solid theological and historical grounds for rejecting the authority of the Apocrypha, this does not therefore imply that it must be rejected as heretical or dangerous. It has been of devotional and instructional value to believers in the past, and there is no reason why it might not continue to be so today. Even if you find no edifying value in the Apocrypha, they are at least worth reading to learn of the time and thought between the Testaments.

Further Reading

Metzger, Bruce. *An Introduction to the Apocrypha*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1957.

7.
The Context for a New Canon

As we turn now to the canon of the New Testament, we consider the question of why it is that a new canon ever arose in the first place. The church had the canon of the Old Testament; what would make it accept a new corpus of books as authoritative right alongside the Hebrew Scriptures? One of the most common reasons proposed is that the New Testament canon was precipitated by the heretic Marcion (c. 85 – c. 160).[1] Marcion was opposed to all Jewish elements in Christianity and created what some have said was the first canon list in the history of the church. In this canon, he used an altered form of Luke and ten of Paul's epistles. The church excommunicated Marcion as a heretic due to his aberrant views, particularly his teaching that the God of the Old Testament was a wrathful lesser god—a demiurge—distinct from the loving Father who sent Jesus Christ, and his truncated canon was rejected as well. According to some interpretations of these events, the reaction against Marcion led to the creation of the canon by the orthodox. Whether or not Marcion created the first canon list of New Testament writings, and whether or not he precipitated the creation of orthodox canon lists in response, we cannot be certain. It is indeed possible that he made the first list, and it is possible that he alerted the orthodox to the need for specifically defined canon lists. Creeds were often formulated in light of theological controversy; it is not unreasonable to suppose that canon lists came to be because of controversy as well. It would be too much to say, however, that Marcion created the *need* for a new canon. The impetus for a new canon goes back much earlier.

Rather than the canon being an idea thrust upon the church by the heretic Marcion, I will argue in this chapter that multiple factors precipitated a new canon from a very early date. These factors are the assumption of authority found in the New Testament writings and the church's understanding of the divine origin of the apostles' teaching. As an additional factor leading to the creation of the canon, we will also consider the book and scribal culture of early Christianity that contributed to the collection of a new canon.

The Authority of the Apostles

One of the major elements of tracing the development of the canon is the criteria by which books were recognized as authoritative and canonical. Typically, such criteria are considered in retrospect, such as catholicity, orthodoxy, apostolicity, etc. What I am concerned with here are criteria that we can detect that determined the earliest Christians' recognition of the New Testament books. Why did they decide a new collection of books should be considered authoritative right alongside the Old Testament Scriptures? Because of the recognized authority of the apostles. Benjamin Laird contends that the church's recognition of apostolic authorship is "arguably the most consequential" factor when it comes to why books were accepted as canonical.[2] He further writes that "the recognition of apostolic authorship enables us to account for the divine inspiration of the canonical writings and to ascertain why they came to be regarded as authoritative by the early church."[3] Why is apostolic authorship so central? Because it is the apostles who were divinely commissioned by Christ and who were inspired by the Holy Spirit. This authority of the apostles was first located in their oral preaching and then became vested in the writings they left behind, which were handed down and collected by the churches.

The Testimony of the New Testament

The authority of the apostles raises the question of whether they knew they were writing what would become a new collection of Scripture. While we cannot answer that question for certain, we can say that they recognized that they were writing with a divinely commissioned authority.[4] Paul speaks of himself as "an apostle—sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead" (Gal 1:1). He further speaks of his message as more than a mere man-made message, for "the gospel I preached was not devised by man. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1:11–12). Paul thanks God that when the Thessalonians "received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as the true word of God—the word which is now at

work in you who believe" (1 Thes. 2:13). Paul similarly asserts his authority to the Corinthians as regards orderly worship when he says, "If anyone considers himself a prophet or spiritual person, let him acknowledge that what I am writing you is the Lord's command. But if anyone ignores this, he himself will be ignored." (1 Cor. 14:37–38). Furthermore, he expects his letters not only to be read at the recipient church, but that they also would be read amongst other congregations (Col. 4:16). In short, Paul understood his apostolic authority and message to be divinely commissioned, to be equivalent to a command from the Lord, and thus his authoritative writings should be read throughout the churches—which is precisely what happened, else we never would have had a collection of Paul's letters.

The apostle John is clear about where the message comes from that he proclaims. In the opening of 1 John, he declares, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our own eyes, which we have gazed upon and touched with our own hands—this is the Word of life… We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard," (1 John 1:1, 3). This message that John proclaims, and that which he has seen, comes not from his own authority, but it is "the message we have heard from Him and announce to you" (1 John 1:5). Like Paul, John shows that his message has a divine origin and is thus authoritative.

The Gospels can hardly be understood in any other way than as authoritative writings; these were the teachings of the Lord Jesus! Indeed, Jesus taught "as one who had authority" (Mark 1:22) and he could command winds and water such that they obeyed him (Luke 8:25). Jesus not only had authority to command the lame to walk but also to forgive sins (Matt. 9:5–7). Writings bearing his words could not help but be understood as authoritative. Even beyond the obvious, however, we also see that the authors of the Gospels expected their writings to function authoritatively. Matthew's pattern of beginning with a genealogy and his general outline suggests that he intended to complete the story of the Old Testament.[5] Mark opens his Gospel by writing, "the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1). The titling of his work as "the gospel" is noteworthy, for, as Kruger says, "that term was not originally used among early Christians to refer to written texts, but rather was a reference to the authoritative message of the apostolic preaching."[6] Luke likewise indicates that he is passing on the apostolic message from "the initial eyewitnesses and servants of the word" by writing "an orderly account" for Theophilus (Luke 1:2–3). John's Gospel is capped off with the statement, "This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who has written them down. And we know that his testimony is true" (John 21:24). The disciple who is the source of this Gospel is the one who bears witness to what he

saw and received, and his written witness was to function as a key touchstone in the Christian community.

Last of all, we cannot but help but note that Revelation assumes a high level of authority right from the start when it is introduced as "the revelation of Jesus Christ," which was made known through the angel to John "who testifies to everything he saw. This is the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 1:1–2). As a divine revelation, it is to be obeyed and attended to, as well as publicly read; the blessing indicates a congregational setting, for there is one singular reader along with a plurality of hearers. The close of Revelation reiterates its authority through the inscriptional curse warning against adding to or taking away from the words of the prophecy, lest the one who does so suffer great consequences (Rev. 22:18–19). There can be little doubt that Revelation was intended to function as authoritative right from the start.

What made the apostles' preaching and teaching capable of carrying such authority? Two factors that we can discern: the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the apostles' divine commission. Likely the most common prooftext for the inspiration of Scripture is 2 Tim. 3:16: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for instruction, for conviction, for correction, and for training in righteousness." Some argue that in this text, the Scripture referred to is only the Old Testament writings, so it is illegitimate to apply this text to the whole of the Old and New Testament equally since the term *Scripture* could not have encompassed the New Testament yet. Paul indeed was almost certainly referring to only the Old Testament when he referred to "all Scripture," but this need not lead to the conclusion that speaking of the Spirit's inspiration of the New Testament is illegitimate. This is due to the nature of the apostles' commission from Christ. They were specifically commissioned by Jesus to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19–20). The teaching that they were to pass on was what they had learned from Jesus. In Luke's account, Jesus opens the apostles' minds "to understand the Scriptures" and affirmed that they were witnesses to the fulfillment of the events of Christ's life, death, and resurrection which had been foretold in the Scriptures (Luke 24:45–47). Their proclamation and understanding of what they had witnessed came from Christ. Furthermore, Jesus promised the apostles the help of the Holy Spirit, who would "teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have told you" (John 14:26). As Jesus promised,

> However, when the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth. For He will not speak on His own, but He will speak what He hears, and He will declare to you what is to

> come. He will glorify Me by taking from what is Mine and disclosing it to you. Everything that belongs to the Father is Mine. That is why I said that the Spirit will take from what is Mine and disclose it to you. (John 16:13–15).

Scripture thus presents the apostles as divinely commissioned to preach what they had seen and what they had received from Jesus and as empowered in this preaching and teaching by the Holy Spirit (see also Acts 1:8). Even in the case of Paul, who was not present for these events in the Gospels, he affirms that what he preached was not a separate revelation, but it was in accord with the other apostles (1 Cor. 15:11). The conclusion is that the teachings of the apostles had a divine source, carried divine authority, and were guided by the influence of the Holy Spirit; in other words, their teachings were inspired by the Holy Spirit. The apostles themselves were not authoritative, but their Lord who commissioned them and the Spirit who guided them granted them authority.

The Testimony of the Church Fathers

The divinely commissioned and guided authority of the apostles is precisely what the earliest Christians recognized and understood. The apostles were closely associated with Christ and their message was thusly accorded authority because its source was divine. Christians from the beginning accepted the authority of the Old Testament and it was initially the only *Scripture* (at least in terminology) that Christians recognized, yet the teachings of the apostles were quickly placed right alongside the Old Testament and, in some cases, perhaps superseded it.

In all probability, the epistle of 1 Clement (c. 95) is the earliest extant Christian writing after the New Testament writings, and it gives us a window into early views of the place of the apostles. Within this letter, Clement shows a high regard for the Old Testament, referring to it as the "holy scriptures which are true, which were given by the Holy Spirit."[7] This same high regard is also evident for Paul's epistles, for he tells the Corinthians to "Take up the epistle of the blessed Paul the apostle… Truly he wrote to you in the Spirit about himself and Cephas and Apollos."[8] The Old Testament scriptures were inspired by the Spirit, and so likewise was Paul. Clement also refers to the apostles as "the greatest and most righteous pillars"[9] and affirms, "The apostles received the gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ; Jesus the Christ was sent forth from God. So then Christ is from God, and the apostles are from Christ."[10] The message that the apostles received was ultimately divinely commissioned; it was not a message deriving from men.

Papias (c. 60 – c. 130), whose early testimony concerning the authorship of the Gospels we have already considered, sought out the traditions and teachings that had been handed down from the apostles:

> But I shall not hesitate also to put down for you along with my interpretations whatsoever things I have at any time learned carefully from the elders and carefully remembered, guaranteeing their truth. For I did not, like the multitude, take pleasure in those that speak much, but in those that teach the truth; not in those that relate strange commandments, but in those that deliver the commandments given by the Lord to faith, and springing from the truth itself.
>
> If, then, any one came, who had been a follower of the elders, I questioned him in regard to the words of the elders, —what Andrew or what Peter said, or what was said by Philip, or by Thomas, or by James, or by John, or by Matthew, or by any other of the disciples of the Lord, and what things Aristion and the presbyter John, the disciples of the Lord, say. For I did not think that what was to be gotten from the books would profit me as much as what came from the living and abiding voice.[11]

Some have understood Papias to be denigrating the value of the written word and preferring oral tradition, but the better understanding is that Papias valued the firsthand testimony of living witnesses more than a written text.[12] What he sought was testimony from those who knew Jesus or those who had known disciples who had known Jesus.

It is also plain that Ignatius of Antioch (died c. 108 – 117) placed a high premium upon the apostles and their authority. In his instruction to the Magnesians concerning the role of the bishop, he says, "as the Lord did nothing without the Father, either by himself or through the apostles (for he was united with him), so you must not do anything without the bishop and the presbyters."[13] The actions of the apostles were extensions of the actions of the Son, who was unified with the Father. It would seem also that Ignatius considered the apostolic preaching concerning Christ to be of even greater authority than the (Old Testament) Scriptures:

> The priests, too, were good, but the high priest, entrusted with the Holy of Holies, is better; he alone has been entrusted with the hidden things of God, for he himself is the door of the Father, through which Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and the prophets and the apostles and the church enter in. All these come together in the unity of God. But the gospel possesses something distinctive, namely, the coming of the Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ, his suffering, and the resurrection. For the beloved prophets preached in anticipation of him, but the gospel is the imperishable finished work. All these things together are good, if you believe with love.[14]

Polycarp of Smyrna (69 – 155), to whom Ignatius had addressed one of his seven letters, urges the Philippians, "let us serve him [Christ] with fear and all reverence, just as he himself has commanded, as did the apostles who preached the gospel to us, and the prophets who announced in advance the coming of our Lord."[15] The two models are the apostles and prophets, those who had proclaimed the divine message concerning Christ. Polycarp's view of the authority of the apostle's teaching may be discerned from the proportion of citations and allusions in his *Epistle to the Philippians*. Metzger notes that "of 112 Biblical reminiscences, about one hundred are from the New Testament with only a dozen from the Old Testament,"[16] pointing to the high value Polycarp placed on apostolic writings.

These earliest figures either likely had personally heard the apostles or had contact with those who knew the apostles. The early date of 1 Clement alone makes such first or secondhand knowledge quite likely, while Clement has been listed as an early successor of Peter and is said to have seen and spoken with the apostles.[17] Papias is said to have been a hearer of John and his testimony indicates that he heard from many who heard from other apostles. Polycarp is reported to have been "instructed by apostles" and to have "conversed with many who had seen Christ,"[18] in addition to having known and conversed with the apostle John.[19] Ignatius was said to be the second bishop of Antioch in succession from Peter.[20] The "living voice" of the apostles still existed in the lives of these earliest Christians; this is one of the reasons that these figures (along with several other writings) are grouped together and known as the *Apostolic Fathers*. In time, however, as the apostles and those who knew them died, this living voice died out.

Though the living voice died out, the writings of the apostles did not. It was in these writings that we know as the New Testament that the apostolic voice continued as the very voice of God. Justin Martyr (c. 100 – c. 165) speaks of having believed "God's voice spoken by the apostles of Christ, and promulgated to us by the prophets."[21] A contemporary, Theophilus of Antioch (died c. 185), could refer to the unity of the Old Testament and at least the Gospels as due to the influence of the Spirit: "concerning the righteousness which the law enjoined, confirmatory utterances are found both with the prophets and in the Gospels, because they all spoke inspired by one Spirit of God."[22] The strongest statements likely come from Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130 – c. 202) on this matter. As the church faced the threat of Gnosticism and its new teachings, Irenaeus turned to apostolic tradition and apostolic succession to combat the threat. Where was this apostolic tradition to be found? In the writings left by the apostles and in the succession of bishops who received these writings and the interpretation of them. He affirms that "We have learned from none others the plan of our salvation, than from those through whom the Gospel has come down to us, which they did at one time proclaim in

public, and, at a later period, by the will of God, handed down to us in the Scriptures, to be the ground and pillar of our faith."[23] For Irenaeus, since the apostles were "disciples of the truth," they were thus also "above all falsehood."[24] What was delivered by them was true and authoritative, and this teaching was deposited in the church and handed down in the apostolic writings.

Summary

The question of when the New Testament came to be termed *Scripture* is sometimes the criterion used to determine when the books became canonical. This terminological distinction, however, overlooks the importance of apostolic authority as determinative in the process of canonization. Various criteria of canonicity have been proposed, such as antiquity, catholicity, orthodoxy, apostolic authority, inspiration, and widespread usage,[25] though most of these are largely retrospective and of limited usage in evaluating the earliest period of canonical development. I agree with Benjamin Laird's judgment that the interrelated nature of the divinely commissioned authority of the apostles and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit gives us our best starting point for understanding why the New Testament writings came to be canonical. The implication for this is that "had the words of the Lord and his apostles not been accorded supreme authority, the written record of their words would never have been canonized."[26] As Michael Kruger notes,

> If the New Testament was the written embodiment of apostolic tradition, then it is not difficult to see why early Christians would have regarded these texts as authoritative from a very early point. Inasmuch as a text was thought to bear the apostolic message, it would have retained the authority of the apostles and thereby the authority of Christ himself. … For this reason, a written New Testament was not something the church formally "decided" to have at some later date, but was instead the natural outworking of the redemptive-historical function of the apostles.[27]

In addition to the foundational authority that the New Testament writings assumed and the apostolic authority that Christians quickly recognized, we have one additional aspect to consider that contributed to the spread and development of the canon: early Christian book culture.

Early Christian Book Culture

While the authority found in the New Testament writings and the divine origin of the apostles' teaching account for the origin of a new canon, it does not help us understand how this new canon came to be spread over a wide geographic area. The books of the Old Testament were written in a rather small region, limited to a particular people, and were gathered and recognized over a long period of time.

By comparison, the New Testament explodes onto the scene and spreads across a relatively wide area quite rapidly. We must have something to account for such a swift dissemination of a new collection of authoritative books.

A People of the Book

It should be mentioned before anything else that Christians, from the very start, were a bookish people. They valued a text and based their doctrine on a text: the Old Testament. Even though most early Christians were illiterate—as was most of the world of the time—they valued texts. They inherited the Old Testament from the Jews, and it was publicly read as authoritative Scripture in their meetings (see 1 Tim. 4:13). The early church was primed to be a people of the book not only through the Old Testament but also through the great literary output of Christians. The New Testament writings bear witness to the usage of texts in the communities, and this literary disposition did not end when the apostles died. Christians of the second and third centuries (and onward) were quite prolific in their literary output. The general Christian culture lent itself to collecting and using authoritative writings.

Letter Writing

From a very early date, Christians wrote letters to each other. This is apparent from the New Testament itself, as, aside from the Gospels and Acts, the rest of the New Testament writings are some sort of letter written to another Christian community. This practice did not stop with the apostles but continued after them as well. As some examples, by the middle of the second century, we have 1 Clement, a letter written from the church in Rome to the church in Corinth; Ignatius wrote seven letters to six other churches and one individual—Polycarp—on the road to martyrdom; Polycarp wrote to the Philippian church; and the account of the Martyrdom of Polycarp was disseminated along with an epistle. Christian communities were not isolated but apparently corresponded and maintained contact with each other. Since this contact took place, so apparently did the sharing of texts.

Christian Scribal Culture

We must remember that in the ancient world, in order to share a book with another community, it had to be copied out by hand. The book trade was rather limited in the first century, and texts were largely circulated privately.[28] This was especially true of Christians, as Christian texts were not aimed at the general public, but at the church in particular. It would thus be the churches who were the interested parties in gathering other Christian texts. Most of our oldest New Testament manuscripts are from the deserts of Egypt, and some of these are from

the second century. What this means is that texts composed in Palestine or from other regions around the Mediterranean rather quickly made their way down into Egypt. We also see an interesting feature in these, our oldest manuscripts: a developed scribal culture. Several aspects stand out in how Christians produced their texts, the first two being the most distinctive. First, they preferred the codex form for their texts. That is, they used a form that is basically what we would consider to be a book, while the more common format of the time was that of the book roll (think a smaller form of a scroll). Second, Christian scribes developed a practice by which they would abbreviate divine names in the text, most commonly God, Lord, Jesus, and Christ. These abbreviations are known as the *nomina sacra* (divine names); it is so unique that the very presence of a *nomen sacrum* is often enough to identify a manuscript as Christian in origin.[29] In addition, Christian texts often appear to have been specifically prepared for public reading. Christian manuscripts display a tendency to have fewer lines per page and fewer letters per line as compared to non-Christian manuscripts, while they exhibit more instances of accents, punctuation, and breathing marks. These elements almost certainly were intended to facilitate the public reading of the texts.[30] Because the first two elements are especially distinctive of Christian scribal culture, I will devote some additional attention to each in turn.

At a time when most of the ancient world was still using the book roll, Christians very quickly adopted the codex. They did so at such a rate that the discrepancy between Christian scribal practice and the practice of the rest of the Greco-Roman world is quite remarkable. In 2005, Larry Hurtado provided data for how Christian book forms compared to other known discoveries. Christian manuscripts accounted for only 1.9% of the total of known manuscripts for the second century and 10.9% in the third century. In the second century, of all manuscripts then known to be extant, only about 5% were codices, while about 21% were codices in the third century. Yet, of this decidedly minority format, at least 27.9% of all known codices from the second century were Christian, while Christian codices in the third century made up 33.8% of all known codices. To put this in perspective, of extant Christian manuscripts from the second century, at least 71% are in codex form, while in the third century, 67% are codices.[31] Hurtado has noted that "In the surviving evidence, we do not see an evolution in Christian preference with incremental stages, but an appropriation of the codex that appears to have been as thorough as it was early."[32] There is no discernible development that leads to this Christian practice; it simply exists as far back as we can see. The early and widespread preference for the codex form cries out for some sort of explanation. Harry Gamble thinks that "there must have been a decisive, precedent-setting development in the publication and circulation of early

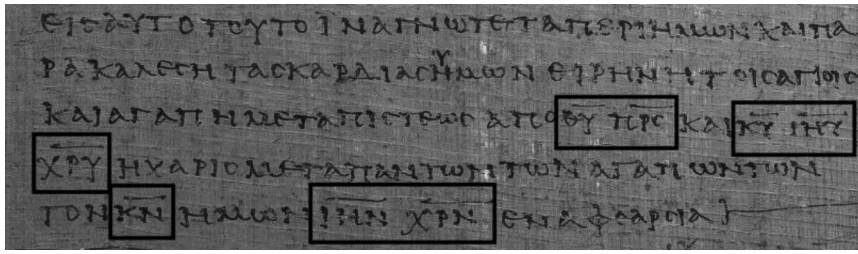


Figure 7.1. Examples of the *nomina sacra* in the late 2nd-/early 3rd-century manuscript, P46. Note the combination of the two letter and three letter abbreviations. In order, the *nomina sacra* are for ΘΕΟΥ (God), ΠΑΤΡΟϹ (Father), ΚΥΡΙΟΥ (Lord), ΙΗϹΟΥ (Jesus), ΧΡΙϹΤΟΥ (Christ), ΚΥΡΙΟΝ (Lord), ΙΗϹΟΥΝ (Jesus), and ΧΡΙϹΤΟΝ (Christ).

Christian literature that rapidly established the codex in Christian use," and he suggests that "there are good reasons to think that this distinction belonged to an early edition of the letters of Paul."[33] The collection of Paul's letters into a corpus is a reasonable assumption, as it seems that a Pauline collection existed quite likely in the first century. Whatever the reason, the definite preference for the codex is a distinctive aspect of Christian scribal practice.

The *nomina sacra*, as mentioned, are abbreviations of the divine names. This abbreviation was most commonly done by writing only the first and last letters of the name and putting a line over the top of it. Less often were three-letter abbreviations (see Figure 7.1 for examples of both types). Similar to the codex form, Christian usage of the *nomina sacra* is an early and widespread phenomenon. As Gamble comments, "No early Christian writer alludes to this transcriptional practice, and we can only conjecture its origin and purpose. It is found in the majority of manuscripts and appears fully developed in the earliest manuscripts available."[34] Hurtado surmises that the *nomina sacra* were marks of the earliest Christians' devotion to the Father and the Son (which I find convincing),[35] but that is a separate topic. What concerns us here is that the widespread practice suggests a high level of Christian cooperation across the Roman Empire, and this cooperation is just the sort of circumstance that would be needed for the rapid dissemination of authoritative books and their collection into what would become a new canon.

Summary

From the very beginning, Christians valued texts. The Old Testament was the Bible of the early church, and it was not long before the apostolic writings functioned as Scripture right alongside it. As Christians shared these apostolic texts amongst their communities, they developed an identifiable scribal culture that

became the vehicle by which these writings were disseminated, leading to their recognition and use around the Mediterranean. The level of contact between early Christian communities means that the apostolic writings would not have been isolated in their original communities for long but would have spread to other regions, allowing for this new collection of authoritative writings to guide the doctrine and practice of the early churches, whether they were in Jerusalem, Alexandria, or Rome.

Conclusion

Why did a new canon develop? What led to Christians valuing specific texts above others? At its most basic level, the reason must be that Christians recognized in the apostles a message that was not of their own making, but a divine one that had been delivered to them by Christ. The apostles were divinely commissioned to preach this message and thus had a unique authority within the church. The apostles and their followers wrote down books, some with the very words of the Lord Jesus Christ, others with their own words, yet each one was assumed to be authoritative due to the unique commissioning of the apostles. As the living voice of the apostles and those who heard them died out, this unique authority came to be located within the writings that the apostles had left behind which were handed down to the churches. These authoritative texts were then spread through a robust Christian book culture. Because Christians communicated with each other across geographical regions, churches around the Mediterranean were not isolated from each other. This communication led to both book-sharing and a very distinctive scribal culture. Those books that were highly valued and recognized as carrying apostolic authority were copied, spread, and sometimes collected into single volumes in the various Christian communities. The recognition and valuing of apostolic authority is the "why" of the canon, and the Christian book culture is the "how" this canon came to develop and quickly be known outside of a small geographical area.

Further Reading

Hurtado, Larry W. *The Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2006.

Kruger, Michael J. T*he Question of Canon: Challenging the Status Quo in the New Testament Debate*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013.

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8.
The Formation of the Core Canon

How the popular imagination pictures the formation of the New Testament canon tends to be more influenced by fiction and rumor than by actual facts. Quite often, it seems that people derive more from the fictional novel *The Da Vinci Code* than from any actual historical source. Ask yourself whether this sounds like anything you have heard before:

> 'The Bible is a product of man, my dear. Not of God. The Bible did not fall magically from the clouds. Man created it as a historical record of tumultuous times, and it has evolved through countless translations, additions and revisions. History has never had a definitive version of the book… More than eighty gospels were considered for the New Testament, and yet only a relative few were chosen for inclusion — Matthew, Mark, Luke and John among them.'
>
> Who chose which gospels to include?' Sophie asked.
>
> 'Aha!' Teabing burst in with enthusiasm. 'The fundamental irony of Christianity! The Bible, as we know it today, was collated by the pagan Roman emperor Constantine the Great.'[1]

Now *The Da Vinci Code* is fiction, but the details are often assumed to be fact by people on the internet or the people you may meet on the street. Not only does this fiction get repeated by the masses, but it sometimes even makes it into books that claim to be non-fiction, such as in the writings of Richard Dawkins:

> An agreed biblical 'canon' — those books agreed as the official list — wasn't finally settled until centuries after Paul's death. … The canon was largely fixed in AD 325 by a conference of church leaders called the Council of Nicaea, set up by the Roman Emperor Constantine — the one whose conversion led to Europe becoming Christian. … Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were only four out of a large number of gospels doing the rounds at the time of the Council of Nicaea.[2]

Dawkins goes on to name this large number of Gospels as around fifty, "any of which might have been included in the canon along with Matthew, Mark, Luke and John."[3] In this popular (and often fictionalized) view of the formation of the canon, the canon we have is one that largely came about both by chance and political machinations. Christians never really had a definite New Testament until the fourth century when its books were chosen under pressure from Constantine at the Council of Nicaea. We could have easily had a Bible filled with very different books, or so the idea goes. There is thus no reason to prefer the teachings found in the New Testament writings to any of the other so-called "lost books" of the Bible. There are just a few major issues with this popular view: it simply is not true and has no basis in historical fact. The Council of Nicaea had nothing to do with the canon of Scripture—the council was called to address the Arian controversy. People would do well to listen to Bart Ehrman on this point, himself a critic of Christianity, but one who does not engage in fictions:

> Despite Dan Brown's claim at the beginning of his novel that all of its 'descriptions of documents… are accurate,' nearly everything he says about the Gospels outside the New Testament is wrong. We don't know if there were eighty Gospels, none of the ones that survive ever mentions Jesus' alleged marriage to Mary Magdalene, and Constantine had nothing to do with deciding which would be included in the New Testament.[4]

We could add to this Ehrman's statement that "the four Gospels we consider to be part of the New Testament were already firmly ensconced well before Constantine's conversion, and the 'other' Gospels had already long been proscribed by Christian leaders as heretical productions—they weren't suppressed by Constantine."[5]

It is also sometimes supposed, as it was by Andy Stanley, that the canon was not actually established until we come to the fourth century, that the church did not truly have a Bible until the contours of the canon were fully established. Again, this is a misreading of history. A core canon was functionally canonical from an early date, and this core provided the church with an authoritative collection from

which to formulate and defend right doctrine. In this chapter, we will trace this core canon through the end of the third century—a period that completely predates the church having any political power and a time when they still experienced intermittent persecution.

The Core Canon

Before we begin, we should offer a word on the sources we have from the second century. The number we have is quite significant all things considered, but they are still a rather small sample. These writings cite the books of the New Testament to varying degrees, but we should not assume that if they do not quote a book that they have no knowledge of it. There is no reason to expect a writer to clearly delineate his full knowledge of all books he considers to be authoritative, especially when we only have a single work from him. The type of literature determines what books are quoted and how they are quoted; an apologetic work directed to the pagan world will of necessity use Christian writings differently than an epistle written to another church. Furthermore, it should be noted that determining which books an author knows is complicated by the way citations were done, as they are not necessarily verbatim and are perhaps quoted from memory or adapted to their contexts. As we get later into the second century, we get a clearer picture of which books are known, but this is likely more due to the fact that we have more substantial writings that have survived in the late second century than we do from the early second century. Our picture of which books are considered to be authoritative during the second century is thus only a partial picture and one that can be tentatively reconstructed at best.

With the caveats established about the limited nature of our second-century sources, we can still reasonably say that by the time we come to the end of the second century—possibly even the middle of it—the core of the canon, consisting of 21 or 22 of the 27 books we know as the New Testament, were well established and beyond dispute. This core consisted of the four Gospels, Acts, the Pauline epistles, 1 Peter, 1 John, Revelation, and possibly Hebrews. We see this core most clearly in writers from the end of the second century and the turn of the third century. Irenaeus recognized at least 23 of the books as authoritative, the Muratorian Fragment knows of 22, and Clement of Alexandria at least 24.[6] While the edges of the canon for these writers were not solidified, there is unquestioned agreement on this core canon. We will work through the books in canonical order, making special note about how early we can clearly see authority recognized in these writings.

The Four Gospels

Have you ever wondered why we have four Gospels? Why not just one? It would certainly make things easier if we had only one, but instead, the church has adopted four Gospels. When did this state of affairs come about? Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130 – c. 202) is the first to bear witness to the fourfold Gospel around the year 180. Though he is the first, the nature of his testimony seems to indicate that what he is speaking of has been long established:

> It is not possible that the Gospels can be either more or fewer in number than they are. For, since there are four zones of the world in which we live, and four principal winds, while the Church is scattered throughout all the world, and the "pillar and ground" of the Church is the Gospel and the spirit of life; it is fitting that she should have four pillars, breathing out immortality on every side, and vivifying men afresh… But that these Gospels alone are true and reliable, and admit neither an increase nor diminution of the aforesaid number, I have proved by so many and such [arguments]. For, since God made all things in due proportion and adaptation, it was fit also that the outward aspect of the Gospel should be well arranged and harmonized.[7]

For Irenaeus, the fact of the fourfold Gospel was so sure that he could consider it to be in harmony with the arrangement of nature and with the four living creatures. Whether or not we find his reasoning to be sound, the confidence he has is what is noteworthy: this is simply the way things had been for him.

That Irenaeus is the earliest extant writer to explicitly number the Gospels as four and only four has led some to suppose he is actually the originator of the idea that the church should have four Gospels. Elaine Pagels has said, "It was Irenaeus, so far as we can tell, who became the principal architect of what we call the four gospel canon, the framework that includes in the New Testament collection the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John."[8] But could Irenaeus have been the fountainhead of such an idea? The whole thrust of his argument is that it is heretics who remove or add Gospels; the orthodox accept these four. Furthermore, the way he speaks of the four Gospels implies that this arrangement was what he had received and that he had no more authority to add or take away Gospels than he had to change the state of nature. What we can adduce from earlier writers shows that Irenaeus was no innovator, while contemporary and later writers accepted the same view of the fourfold canon—remarkably quickly if it was an innovation, which would seem quite strange if Irenaeus indeed introduced all four Gospels to the church.

In the middle of the second century, Justin Martyr (c. 100 – c. 165) refers to the Christian gathering on Sunday when "all who live in cities or in the country

gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read."[9] Justin calls these memoirs "Gospels"[10] and says that they were "drawn up by His apostles and those who followed them,"[11] which is quite suggestive, for of the four Gospels, two are attributed to apostles (Matthew and John) while two are attributed to followers of the apostles (Mark and Luke).[12] As Charles Hill comments on the significance of this statement, "It is worth noting that in Justin's day there were apparently no Gospels besides those of Mark and Luke which were attributed to followers of Jesus' apostles."[13] Justin also seems to know of the tradition of associating Mark's Gospel with Peter and refers to one of these memoirs as belonging to Peter.[14] Though he makes no explicit enumeration of the Gospels he knows, he shows evidence of his knowledge of the Gospels by making citations that derive from all three Synoptic Gospels and, given his knowledge of John as the author of Revelation and allusions and language similar to John's Gospel, it is a fair assumption that he knew all four.[15]

Justin's knowledge of all four Gospels looks more likely when we consider that his disciple, Tatian, created a Gospel harmony called the *Diatessaron*, which means "through four." This Gospel harmony was of the four canonical Gospels, not of Matthew, Mark, Thomas, and Mary, or some other such combination, but of the exact four canonical Gospels. The natural conclusion for the need to harmonize is that it is only these four Gospels that were viewed as authoritative. One does not attempt to reconcile works that are not deemed authoritative. This is so because, while it would be simpler to discard difficult writings, the authoritative status of the Gospels meant Christians were not free to remove Gospels but had to determine how to harmonize the sometimes differing Gospel accounts.

The struggle with the second century is that the sources that have survived are not all that extensive. One of the most important sources, Papias, is largely lost to history, except for a few excerpts of his writings that have been preserved by other later writers. What is preserved is significant, however. As we have previously mentioned, Papias in the early second century refers to Mark, the interpreter of Peter, who "wrote down accurately, though not in order, whatsoever he remembered of the things said or done by Christ" and also to Matthew, who "wrote the oracles in the Hebrew language, and every one interpreted them as he was able."[16] We can tell from this explicit testimony that he accepted two Gospels, but there is reason to believe that he knew also of John. According to Metzger, "Other scattered evidence preserved by Eusebius, Jerome, Philip of Side, as well as several later Fathers, indicates that Papias knew the Fourth Gospel, 1 Peter, 1 John, and the Apocalypse. As for the Gospel according to Luke and the Epistles of Paul, we hear nothing in the extracts that have happened to survive."[17]

While the early and middle parts of the second century have few surviving Christian writers, by the time we come to the latter end of the second and into the third century, we find a comparative explosion of references to the four Gospels of the church. The Muratorian Fragment (late second-century) almost certainly lists all four Gospels in its canon list. The beginning of the list is missing, but it picks up at Luke's Gospel and lists John's, making it almost certain to have contained Matthew and Mark. In a manner very similar to Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria (c. 150 – c. 215) provides a listing of the order of the four Gospels.[18] Hippolytus of Rome (c. 170 – c. 235) can say, "Christ, himself being the river, is preached in the whole world through the fourfold Gospel."[19] Around the turn of the third century, Tertullian (c. 155 – c. 220) speaks of the four Gospels in a way reminiscent of Justin: "Of the apostles, therefore, John and Matthew first instil faith into us; whilst of apostolic men, Luke and Mark renew it afterwards."[20] Soon after, Origen (c. 185 – c. 253) can declare, "The Church has four Gospels. Heretics have very many."[21] He elsewhere says that these four "alone are uncontroverted in the Church of God under heaven."[22] Cyprian of Carthage (c. 210 – 258) says, "The Church, setting forth the likeness of paradise, includes within her walls fruit-bearing trees, whereof that which does not bring forth good fruit is cut off and is cast into the fire. These trees she waters with four rivers, that is, with the four Gospels."[23] The widespread acknowledgement we see in the late second and early third century leads us to confidently say that the fourfold Gospel was well entrenched by the time we come to the end of the second century.

To this point, we have primarily concerned ourselves with those writers who explicitly or implicitly show evidence of using all four Gospels. This is hardly the only evidence we have. There is also the matter of writings where Gospels are used, but we are not sure of the extent of the writers' knowledge. We could point to the Didache (c. 100), which probably made use of Matthew; Ignatius (died c. 108–117) seems to have known multiple Gospels, with allusions to Matthew, Luke, and John;[24] The Epistle of Barnabas (early second-century) cites Matthew with the formula "it is written;"[25] The *Apology of Aristides* (early second-century) points to written Gospels being in use, as he challenges to emperor to read the Gospel;[26] Polycarp (69 – 155) appears to quote from the Synoptic Gospels, though it is not easy to identify which these may be.[27] Whether these figures knew all four Gospels, we cannot know for sure, though there is at least a reasonable case to be made that Polycarp did.[28]

Interestingly enough, the second-century critic of Christianity, Celsus, possibly preserves knowledge of a fourfold Gospel outside of Christian circles. He accused Christians of having "corrupted the Gospel from its original integrity, to a threefold, and fourfold, and many-fold degree, and have remodelled it, so that

they might be able to answer objections."[29] Origen, who preserves what survives of Celsus's writing, understood him to be making accusations of intentional corruption of the manuscripts, though it is possible he was referring to his knowledge of three or four Gospels.

This practice of using all four Gospels was unique to the orthodox. Irenaeus makes it a point to demonstrate that the heretics of his time either used only one Gospel—such as the Marcionites only using a mutilated version of Luke or the Montanists preferring only John—or they used others of their own composition such that they "boast that they possess more Gospels than there really are."[30] Did Irenaeus choose these four Gospels and foist them upon the church? Such a conclusion would lend too much influence to Irenaeus and would discount what can be discerned from earlier writers. While we cannot necessarily say for certain that the four Gospels were universally recognized by the middle of the second century, there is good reason to believe that they were indeed recognized by the orthodox and used quite broadly by then. We also want to note that at no point in time do we see any conscious decision to choose which Gospels to accept; all that we see is that these were the writings (or memoirs) of the apostles that had been handed down to the church. The Council of Nicaea certainly did not choose them in the year 325, and neither did any other formal decision of the church. We might conclude with Charles Hill, "We cannot find who chose the Gospels. It looks like nobody did."[31]

The Acts of the Apostles

As we mentioned in Chapter 3, Acts has closely been linked with Luke's Gospel, both in terms of authorship as well as in terms of usage. Since Acts is the second volume of a unified work by Luke, it is not unreasonable to link their acceptance to each other. There are few citations of it during the second century, so we cannot speak of an earliest date of its acceptance. The earliest clear usage of Acts is found in Irenaeus, where he links Acts to Luke.[32] Around the same time period, the Muratorian Fragment lists Acts, noting that "the acts of all the apostles were written in one book. For 'most excellent Theophilus' Luke compiled the individual events that took place in his presence."[33] Acts is also included with the four Gospels in the third-century manuscript, P45. While it is not widely quoted or mentioned until the end of the second century, the impression we receive from Irenaeus and the Muratorian Fragment is that this book was well received and was beyond any dispute. Its status is such that Tertullian in the early third century could chide the Marcionites for rejecting it.[34]

The Pauline Epistles

It would appear that Paul's epistles were not accepted individually with the church coming to know of them one by one. Rather, it appears that his epistles have always been known and accepted as part of some sort of collection of letters. It is in fact not unreasonable to suppose that Paul's epistles were the first New Testament writings to be collected and recognized as an authoritative apostolic deposit. They are, at the very least, the earliest written documents. We see indications that Paul's letters were placed into a collection by the time 2 Peter was written, where we read,

> Consider also that our Lord's patience brings salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom God gave him. He writes this way in all his letters, speaking in them about such matters. Some parts of his letters are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction. (2 Pet. 3:15–16).

The reference to "all his letters" points to a number of Paul's epistles that had been collected and were widespread enough to apparently be known and misused. How many epistles this may have been is not known, but the passage marks an early date for the circulation of a collection of Paul's epistles.

In the earliest writings after the New Testament—a group of writers known as the Apostolic Fathers—we see a fair amount of knowledge and respect for Paul's epistles. By the end of the first century, 1 Clement (c. 95) was using Paul's epistles as authoritative writings. As we noted above, Clement urges the Corinthians to "Take up the epistle of the blessed Paul the apostle… Truly he wrote to you in the Spirit about himself and Cephas and Apollos."[35] This is a clear reference to 1 Corinthians, which indicates that the church in Rome and in Corinth have this epistle in common. He also makes a reasonably clear allusion to Romans and possibly alludes to other Pauline epistles, to include Galatians, Ephesians, and Philippians,[36] which leads Metzger to suggest that such allusions "may presuppose the existence of a collection of Pauline Epistles."[37] Knowledge and regard for Paul's epistles is detected in Ignatius, with his language showing Pauline influence, though we cannot say how many epistles he knew. He at least seems to know 1 Corinthians, Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, and Philippians, though which epistles exactly he alludes to is a matter of some interpretation.[38] Ignatius also indicates that he knew some form of a collection, for in his *Epistle to the Ephesians*, he refers to "Paul… who in every epistle makes mention of you in Christ Jesus."[39] This could possibly suggest knowledge of 1–2 Timothy, for Paul mentions the Ephesians in these two epistles as well as in 1 Corinthians and Ephesians. By far

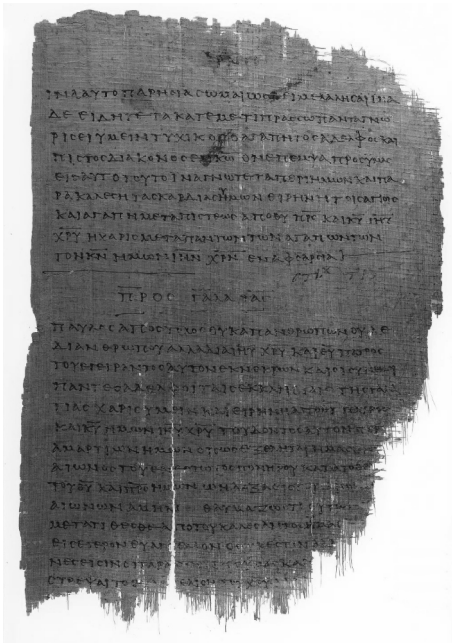


Figure 8.1. A page from the late 2nd-/early 3rd-century manuscript P46, which contains surviving portions of eight of Paul's epistles and Hebrew. Depicted is the end of Ephesians and the title and beginning of Galatians.

the clearest early writer of the Apostolic Fathers is Polycarp, as he makes quite extensive use of the New Testament writings. Michael Holmes notes that Polycarp made use of 1 Corinthians and Ephesians, probably used 1–2 Timothy, and possibly also Romans, Galatians, and Philippians. As Holmes concludes, "the manner in which Polycarp refers to them indicates that he viewed them as authoritative writings."[40] These writers together give us a picture that a collection of Paul's epistles was widespread and well known, though it does not necessarily tell us how many epistles were in this collection.

The earliest defined collection of Paul's epistles that we know of is that of the heretic Marcion around the year 140, who used an edited form of ten of Paul's epistles. He did not include the pastoral epistles (1–2 Timothy, Titus) in this edited collection; whether this is from a lack of knowledge or intentional exclusion is not entirely clear. Tertullian accused Marcion of intentionally excluding the pastoral epistles from his collection of Paul's letters.[41] If he is correct about this, then that indicates a thirteen (or fourteen) letter collection by about the 140s. In any case, Marcion made his own collection from an already existing collection of ten or more of Paul's epistles. The full collection was known to Irenaeus, and the con-

temporaneous Muratorian Fragment lists thirteen letters of Paul, as does Gaius (early second-century), whom Eusebius says "mentions only thirteen epistles of the holy apostle, not counting that to the Hebrews with the others."[42] While we cannot pinpoint when the full collection of Paul's letters was known, we can say with certainty that it was by the end of the second century, and there are good reasons for thinking this full collection was generally known by the middle of the second century, if not earlier.

Hebrews

Hebrews may possibly be considered to be a part of the core canon of the New Testament, though its status is less clear than the others. The lack of clarity comes from Hebrews often being included amongst Paul's letters, thus making it not always apparent when Hebrews was assumed and when it was not known. When a writer refers to "all of Paul's epistles," he may be including Hebrews in such a reference. We know, for example, that it was being included in collections of Paul's letters by the end of the second century, as it was in the late second-/early third-century manuscript P46, which contains eight of Paul's epistles along with Hebrews. This state of affairs muddies the waters a bit as far as clarity goes. Furthermore, disputes over Paul's authorship led some to question the legitimacy of Hebrews. That said, the epistle was known and used by the end of the first century by the church in Rome, for it was used in an authoritative manner by Clement of Rome, with rather clear allusions being made in 1 Clement multiple times.[43] Polycarp almost certainly knew Hebrews, alluding to its text[44] and referring to Jesus as "the eternal high priest."[45] We have no explicit references to Hebrews in the surviving writings of Irenaeus, though Eusebius says that in a work that is now lost, he "mentions the Epistle to the Hebrews and the so-called Wisdom of Solomon, making quotations from them."[46] The epistle was accepted by Clement of Alexandria, who believed Paul had first written it in Hebrew, which was then translated into Greek by Luke. He also preserves the opinion of an earlier figure, possibly Pantaenus (died c. 200), who said that Paul had intentionally written the epistle anonymously.[47] We thus see geographical diversity and usage of this epistle, from Rome, to Smyrna, to Alexandria, which suggests very early and widespread dissemination of Hebrews.

The general opinion was that Paul had written the epistle to the Hebrews. Origen, who did not believe Paul personally wrote it, nevertheless believed it to be closely connected with Paul's theology and did not find it objectionable that many would consider it to be Paul's. As he said, "if any church holds that this epistle is by Paul, let it be commended for this. For not without reason have the ancients handed it down as Paul's."[48] Yet the tradition of Paul's authorship seems to have

led to some trouble regarding the epistle's acceptance in the church at Rome. Despite the very early usage we see in 1 Clement, later doubts arose when Paul's authorship was questioned. In his day, Eusebius wrote "Paul's fourteen epistles are well known and undisputed. It is not indeed right to overlook the fact that some have rejected the Epistle to the Hebrews, saying that it is disputed by the church of Rome, on the ground that it was not written by Paul."[49] Gaius, as we have noted, did not count Hebrews as Pauline, and Eusebius further mentions that, in continuity with Gaius, "unto our day there are some among the Romans who do not consider this a work of the apostle."[50] This questioning of Hebrews appears to have been confined to the West in general and the church at Rome in particular. Though the question of Pauline authorship led to localized disputes over its authority, whether Paul wrote the epistle, interestingly enough, does not seem to have been a major factor in the epistle's acceptance. Tertullian indicates he knew of the epistle as deriving from Barnabas, but still considered it to be authoritative.[51] Origen had no qualms about it being written by someone other than Paul and seems to have been rather indifferent on the matter of authorship.[52] We see no disputes about Hebrews in the East, and it would appear that whether or not Paul was the author of the epistle had little impact on how its authority was viewed.

How did Hebrews come to be viewed as authoritative? The close association with Paul seems too pervasive to be an accident of history. Whether or not Paul was personally involved in the epistle has always been an open question, but what does not seem to be in question is that the epistle was associated with his apostolic teaching in some way. It would seem the best explanation for why the letter spread from an early date is that the church recognized within it the apostolic teaching, and that in the manner as it was delivered by Paul. It was accepted very early and spread right alongside Paul's thirteen epistles. The main reason why we speak of this as on the fringes of the core canon is because of the disputes that later occurred in the West, mostly associated with the church in Rome. Other than these localized disputes, which had no effect in the East and later petered out in the West, we see Hebrews as very well established as authoritative during the second century and into the third. It is one of the writings received from the apostolic generation.

The Two Catholic Epistles

The two books that are perhaps the most surprising to be known and recognized at an early date are the two catholic epistles of 1 John and 1 Peter. Given the relative minor usage of the other catholic epistles, we might have expected something similar with these two, but that is simply not the case. Papias appar-

ently knew and used both of these epistles,[53] and Polycarp also knew and quoted both,[54] giving us two early second-century witnesses. Irenaeus quotes 1 Peter by name[55] and he considered 1 John to be authoritative, linking it closely to John's Gospel.[56] The Muratorian Fragment lists 1 John in its canon list, but does not make mention of 1 Peter. According to Metzger, Clement of Alexandria cites "all the books of the New Testament with the exception of Philemon, James, 2 Peter, and 2 and 3 John," thus indicating his own acceptance of these epistles.[57] Knowledge of and respect for these epistles in the second century is spread from Hierapolis, to Smyrna, to Lyons, to Alexandria. There was never any debate concerning these epistles that we are aware of. The picture we get from Origen is that both epistles were widely known and used by his time in the third century.[58] Eusebius mentions no disputes concerning these books, and he assuredly would have done so were he aware of any. These short books are thus universally established in the church by the end of the second century.

Revelation

In many ways, Revelation has some of the best early attestation of all of the books of the New Testament. The earliest figure we know who accepted the authority of Revelation is Papias. We can infer this first from Eusebius's reference to Papias's belief in a thousand year period after the resurrection when "the kingdom of Christ will be set up in material form on this very earth."[59] We can also glean this from the later commentary on Revelation by Andrew of Caesarea (563–614), where he cites a now lost work of Papias in which he provided an interpretation of Revelation 12:7–8.[60] Furthermore, Andrew cites Papias among other authorities who accepted Revelation: "Concerning the divine inspiration of the book, we believe it superfluous to lengthen the discussion, since its trustworthiness is witnessed by the Blessed Gregory the Theologian, Cyril, in addition to the more ancient fathers, Papias, Irenaeus, Methodios and Hippolytus."[61]

Many notable Christian writers throughout the second century accepted Revelation. Justin Martyr says he knows of "a certain man with us, whose name was John, one of the apostles of Christ, who prophesied, by a revelation that was made to him, that those who believed in our Christ would dwell a thousand years in Jerusalem."[62] Such a statement strongly indicates Justin's acceptance of Revelation as authoritative. Irenaeus identifies John as the author of Revelation[63] and devotes a lengthy discussion at the end of *Against Heresies* to eschatology, in which he makes numerous references to Revelation.[64] The Muratorian Fragment accepts Revelation as from John, and it shows no indications that it was disputed.[65] Eusebius indicates that Melito of Sardis wrote a commentary on the Apocalypse of John.[66] When we look to the third century, the same trend contin-



Figure 8.2. The locations of Christian writers who bear witness to the core canon during the 2nd and 3rd centuries. The core canon spread far and wide geographically.

ues: Tertullian names John as the author of the Apocalypse and cites it authoritatively;[67] Hippolytus speaks of the author of Revelation as "blessed John, apostle and disciple of the Lord"[68] and considers the words to have been delivered by the Holy Spirit.[69] Origen also names John the apostle as author of both the Gospel and Revelation and gives the writings equal authority.[70] These figures are spread across the early Christian world, from Alexandria, to Lyons, to Rome, and to Carthage. Such a geographic spread points to Revelation's early and wide acceptance.

As we will examine further in Chapter 10, despite Revelation's very strong and clear early recognition, later disputes arose over whether to accept its authority. Though these disputes occurred, they do not change our designation of Revelation as part of the canonical core, for its early functional authority is unaffected by later disputes and opinions.

Conclusion

That a canonical core existed during the second century and was virtually beyond dispute by the end of it is quite a significant matter. It clearly shows that, in addition to the Old Testament, the New Testament writings played a normative role in the church and that no fourth-century decisions led to the creation of a canon. This early emergence also means that the church could speak of right doctrine during the second century, for there were books by which orthodoxy could be measured. What the core does not mean, however, is that the edges were solidi-

fied. Some books that we accept as canonical were disputed and not as widely known during the second century, while certain books were used that would not ultimately be deemed to be authoritative. Significantly, as Kruger notes, "these core books would have provided a theological and doctrinal foundation for analyzing the orthodoxy of peripheral books such as 2 Peter, Jude, and 3 John."[71] Once we begin to move into the third century, these edges seem to solidify more and more. Part of the reason for this is the increased number of writings that we have access to, but there is also the matter of increased knowledge of the New Testament writings as they become spread further around the Roman Empire. In the next chapter, we turn to the filling out of the canon and the solidification of its edges.

Further Reading

Hill, Charles E. *Who Chose the Gospels? Probing the Great Gospel Conspiracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Laird, Benjamin P. *Creating the Canon: Composition, Controversy, and the Authority of the New Testament*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2023.

9.
Filling Out the Canon

As we have seen, a core canon of the New Testament existed by the end of the second century. This gives us a functional canon that most (if not all) of the orthodox church acknowledged as authoritative. What it does not give us, however, is a firm limit to the edges of the canon. While those 21 or 22 books were widely agreed upon, there was not yet agreement upon where the canon ended. In this chapter, we will trace the solidifying of the edges of the canon largely through the lenses of the various canon lists. These will show the movement through time and the eventual recognition of a full 27 book canon.

Canon Lists

The Muratorian Fragment (Late Second Century)

The Muratorian Fragment comes from an eighth-century Latin manuscript, containing a text translated from Greek, which is typically dated to the late second century. While some would date this to the fourth century, such arguments have not won the day for the majority of scholars.[1] I follow here the traditional understanding that the Muratorian Fragment represents the earliest extant canon list. The text is somewhat fragmentary, beginning at the end of what was presumably a discussion of Mark's Gospel. I present the text here in full:

> . . . at which nevertheless he was present, and so he placed [them in his narrative]. The third book of the Gospel is that according to Luke. Luke, the well-known physician, after

the ascension of Christ, when Paul had taken with him as one zealous for the law, composed it in his own name, according to [the general] belief. Yet he himself had not seen the Lord in the flesh; and therefore, as he was able to ascertain events, so indeed he begins to tell the story from the birth of John. The fourth of the Gospels is that of John, [one] of the disciples. To his fellow disciples and bishops, who had been urging him [to write], he said, 'Fast with me from today to three days, and what will be revealed to each one let us tell it to one another.' In the same night it was revealed to Andrew, [one] of the apostles, that John should write down all things in his own name while all of them should review it. And so, though various elements may be taught in the individual books of the Gospels, nevertheless this makes no difference to the faith of believers, since by the one sovereign Spirit all things have been declared in all [the Gospels]: concerning the nativity, concerning the passion, concerning the resurrection, concerning life with his disciples, and concerning his twofold coming; the first in lowliness when he was despised, which has taken place, the second glorious in royal power, which is still in the future. What marvel is it then, if John so consistently mentions these particular points also in his Epistles, saying about himself, 'What we have seen with our eyes and heard with our ears and our hands have handled, these things we have written to you? For in this way he professes [himself] to be not only an eye-witness and hearer, but also a writer of all the marvelous deeds of the Lord, in their order. Moreover, the acts of all the apostles were written in one book. For 'most excellent Theophilus' Luke compiled the individual events that took place in his presence — as he plainly shows by omitting the martyrdom of Peter as well as the departure of Paul from the city [of Rome] when he journeyed to Spain. As for the Epistles of Paul, they themselves make clear to those desiring to understand, which ones [they are], from what place, or for what reason they were sent. First of all, to the Corinthians, prohibiting their heretical schisms; next, to the Galatians, against circumcision; then to the Romans he wrote at length, explaining the order (or, plan) of the Scriptures, and also that Christ is their principle (or, main theme). It is necessary for us to discuss these one by one, since the blessed apostle Paul himself, following the example of his predecessor John, writes by name to only seven churches in the following sequence: To the Corinthians first, to the Ephesians second, to the Philippians third, to the Colossians fourth, to the Galatians fifth, to the Thessalonians sixth, to the Romans seventh. It is true that he writes once more to the Corinthians and to the Thessalonians for the sake of admonition, yet it is clearly

> recognizable that there is one Church spread throughout the whole extent of the earth. For John also in the Apocalypse, though he writes to seven churches, nevertheless speaks to all. [Paul also wrote] out of affection and love one to Philemon, one to Titus, and two to Timothy; and these are held sacred in the esteem of the Church catholic for the regulation of ecclesiastical discipline. There is current also [an epistle] to the Laodiceans, [and] another to the Alexandrians, [both] forged in Paul's name to [further] the heresy of Marcion, and several others which cannot be received into the catholic Church — for it is not fitting that gall be mixed with honey. Moreover, the epistle of Jude and two of the above-mentioned (or, bearing the name of) John are counted (or, used) in the catholic [Church]; and [the book of] Wisdom, written by the friends of Solomon in his honour. We receive only the apocalypses of John and Peter, though some of us are not willing that the latter be read in church. But Hermas wrote the Shepherd very recently, in our times, in the city of Rome, while bishop Pius, his brother, was occupying the [episcopal] chair of the church of the city of Rome. And therefore it ought indeed to be read; but it cannot be read publicly to the people in church either among the Prophets, whose number is complete, or among the Apostles, for it is after [their] time. But we accept nothing whatever of Arsinous or Valentinus or Miltiades, who also composed a new book of psalms for Marcion, together with Basilides, the Asian founder of the Cataphrygians…[2]

We enter into the list mid-sentence, but there is no reason to doubt that Matthew and Mark were named just prior to where the text begins. In this list, we have all the books of the New Testament except a single epistle of John (probably 3 John), 1–2 Peter, James, and Hebrews; whether this is due to lack of knowledge or rejection, we are not sure. Given the list's discussion of rejected books, ignorance seems more likely. What is noteworthy is the addition of the Wisdom of Solomon—which is one of books of the Apocrypha—and the Apocalypse of Peter. Concerning the Wisdom of Solomon, it is a strange inclusion amongst the writings of the New Testament, and there is no good explanation as to its listing here. We should note that it was a popular writing among early Christians, and there was perhaps some confusion as to which collection it belonged to. The Apocalypse of Peter presents an interesting case as the author of the Muratorian Fragment shows himself to be aware that some do not accept it, even though he disagrees. The author demonstrates awareness of limits to what could be canonical, for though he appreciates the Shepherd of Hermas, it is not apostolic and cannot be placed on the same level. Furthermore, there are books which are outright rejected. In

all, the Muratorian Fragment bears witness to 22 of the 27 books being accepted, while adding two additional books.

Origen's Lists (Early–Mid Third Century)

It appears to be probable that by the middle of the third century, at least in Alexandria, all 27 books were known and well-established. In the writings of Origen, we find a rather unlikely place for a canon list: a homily on Joshua. While Origen is not necessarily specifically enumerating the books for the mere purpose of making a list, he nonetheless provides us one in expounding upon Joshua:

> But when our Lord Jesus Christ comes, whose arrival that prior son of Nun designated, he sends priests, his apostles, bearing "trumpets hammered thin," the magnificent and heavenly instruction of proclamation. Matthew first sounded the priestly trumpet in his Gospel; Mark also; Luke and John each played their own priestly trumpets. Even Peter cries out with trumpets in two of his epistles; also James and Jude. In addition, John also sounds the trumpet through his epistles [and Revelation], and Luke, as he describes the Acts of the Apostles. And now that last one comes, the one who said, "I think God displays us apostles last," and in fourteen of his epistles, thundering with trumpets, he casts down the walls of Jericho and all the devices of idolatry and dogmas of philosophers, all the way to the foundations.[3]

Potential issues with this passage exist due to it only existing in the Latin translation of Rufinus, who had been known to adjust the text he was translating, thus he may have updated Origen's list. Defenses of Rufinus's reliability in translation have been made, however.[4] There is also a textual question of whether Origen listed Revelation; he may have, but it is doubtful. If this text is reliably translated and preserved by Rufinus, it is the earliest nearly complete list of the New Testament books, and potentially the earliest complete list if Revelation was indeed mentioned by Origen.

We do not need to rely only on this one text to speak of how many books Origen knew. Elsewhere, he enumerates all the authors of the New Testament: "Isaac, therefore, digs also new wells, nay rather Isaac's servants dig them. Isaac's servants are Matthew, Mark, Luke, John; his servants are Peter, James, Jude; the apostle Paul is his servant. These all dig the wells of the New Testament."[5] Furthermore, Eusebius provides a summary of Origen's listing of the canonical books by excerpting from several of his writings:

> In his first book on Matthew's Gospel, maintaining the Canon of the Church, he testifies that he knows only four Gospels, writing as follows: "Among the four Gospels,

which are the only indisputable ones in the Church of God under heaven, I have learned by tradition that the first was written by Matthew, who was once a publican, but afterwards an apostle of Jesus Christ, and it was prepared for the converts from Judaism, and published in the Hebrew language. The second is by Mark, who composed it according to the instructions of Peter, who in his Catholic epistle acknowledges him as a son, saying, 'The church that is at Babylon elected together with you, salutes you, and so does Marcus, my son.' And the third by Luke, the Gospel commended by Paul, and composed for Gentile converts. Last of all that by John."

In the fifth book of his Expositions of John's Gospel, he speaks thus concerning the epistles of the apostles: "But he who was 'made sufficient to be a minister of the New Testament, not of the letter, but of the Spirit,' that is, Paul, who 'fully preached the Gospel from Jerusalem and round about even unto Illyricum,' did not write to all the churches which he had instructed and to those to which he wrote he sent but few lines. And Peter, on whom the Church of Christ is built, 'against which the gates of hell shall not prevail,' has left one acknowledged epistle; perhaps also a second, but this is doubtful. Why need we speak of him who reclined upon the bosom of Jesus, John, who has left us one Gospel, though he confessed that he might write so many that the world could not contain them? And he wrote also the Apocalypse, but was commanded to keep silence and not to write the words of the seven thunders. He has left also an epistle of very few lines; perhaps also a second and third; but not all consider them genuine, and together they do not contain hundred lines."

In addition he makes the following statements in regard to the Epistle to the Hebrews in his Homilies upon it: "That the verbal style of the epistle entitled 'To the Hebrews,' is not rude like the language of the apostle, who acknowledged himself 'rude in speech' that is, in expression; but that its diction is purer Greek, any one who has the power to discern differences of phraseology will acknowledge. Moreover, that the thoughts of the epistle are admirable, and not inferior to the acknowledged apostolic writings, any one who carefully examines the apostolic text will admit.'

Farther on he adds: "If I gave my opinion, I should say that the thoughts are those of the apostle, but the diction and phraseology are those of some one who remembered the apostolic teachings, and wrote down at his leisure what had been said by his teacher. Therefore if any church holds that this epistle is by Paul, let it be commended for this. For not without reason have the ancients handed it down as Paul's. But who wrote the epistle, in truth, God knows. The

> statement of some who have gone before us is that Clement, bishop of the Romans, wrote the epistle, and of others that Luke, the author of the Gospel and the Acts, wrote it." But let this suffice on these matters.[6]

The writings of Origen strongly indicate that all books of the New Testament were known and generally accepted within Alexandria by the middle of the second century. Although Origen personally gave varying degrees of respect to writings outside of the canon, he seemed to only fully acknowledge these 27 writings that were commonly accepted by the churches.

Eusebius of Caesarea (Early Fourth Century)

By the time we come to the fourth century, the basic edges of the canon appear to have been laid, though they were not yet wholly solidified. When we read Eusebius's list, we see the core canon listed as accepted by all, and to this is added the peripheral books which were disputed. This is not yet an unambiguous 27-book canon list, but it is quite close:

> Since we are dealing with this subject it is proper to sum up the writings of the New Testament which have been already mentioned. First then must be put the holy quaternion of the Gospels; following them the Acts of the Apostles. After this must be reckoned the epistles of Paul; next in order the extant former epistle of John, and likewise the epistle of Peter, must be maintained. After them is to be placed, if it really seem proper, the Apocalypse of John, concerning which we shall give the different opinions at the proper time. These then belong among the accepted writings.
>
> Among the disputed writings, which are nevertheless recognized by many, are extant the so-called epistle of James and that of Jude, also the second epistle of Peter, and those that are called the second and third of John, whether they belong to the evangelist or to another person of the same name.
>
> Among the rejected writings must be reckoned also the Acts of Paul, and the so-called Shepherd, and the Apocalypse of Peter, and in addition to these the extant epistle of Barnabas, and the so-called Teachings of the Apostles; and besides, as I said, the Apocalypse of John, if it seem proper, which some, as I said, reject, but which others class with the accepted books. And among these some have placed also the Gospel according to the Hebrews, with which those of the Hebrews that have accepted Christ are especially delighted. And all these may be reckoned among the disputed books.[7]

Some comment is in order for how Eusebius labels the books according to three categories: accepted, disputed, and spurious (or rejected). The final two categories

are not, in reality, very well defined, for while he lists them separately, he sums them up by noting that these are the disputed books. It would seem that the category of disputed would be those that Eusebius considers to be orthodox and canonical, though they are disputed, while those that are listed as spurious are books that are orthodox but not canonical.[8] We should also note that Eusebius treats Revelation (the Apocalypse of John) in a rather peculiar manner: he considers it to be accepted by all but then lists it with the rejected books. This opinion is likely due more to Eusebius's own personal theological biases than anything else, as we will see in the following chapter.

Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 350)

The canon list of Cyril of Jerusalem comes from his *Catechetical Lectures*—lectures intended to instruct young believers in the basics of the Christian faith. This portion was to teach these catechumens what they were to receive as Scripture:

> Then of the New Testament there are the four Gospels only, for the rest have false titles and are mischievous. The Manichaeans also wrote a Gospel according to Thomas, which being tinctured with the fragrance of the evangelic title corrupts the souls of the simple sort. Receive also the Acts of the Twelve Apostles; and in addition to these the seven Catholic Epistles of James, Peter, John, and Jude; and as a seal upon them all, and the last work of the disciples, the fourteen Epistles of Paul. But let all the rest be put aside in a secondary rank. And whatever books are not read in Churches, these read not even by yourself, as you have heard me say. Thus much of these subjects.[9]

Cyril's list follows an Eastern order for the listing of the books, and very nearly matches the full 27 books. It is lacking the book of Revelation, which was not uncommon for churches in the East at the time due to the disputes that arose concerning its authority.

Athanasius of Alexandria (367)

Athanasius is the earliest writer to list all 27 books of the New Testament canon in an unambiguous fashion. As I hope is evident by this point in time, though he is the earliest figure we know of to list all 27 books, this hardly makes him the architect of the New Testament canon, nor does it mean he himself settled the canon once and for all. This list is found in his 39th Festal Letter. These festal letters were sent out every year by the bishop of Alexandria to announce the date for the celebration of Easter. Accompanying this announcement was additional teaching that the bishop saw fitting for the year. In his 39th Festal Letter, Athana-

sius decided to address the question of the canon of Scripture. Here we present only his comments on the New Testament:

> Again it is not tedious to speak of the [books] of the New Testament. These are, the four Gospels, according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Afterwards, the Acts of the Apostles and Epistles (called Catholic), seven, viz. of James, one; of Peter, two; of John, three; after these, one of Jude. In addition, there are fourteen Epistles of Paul, written in this order. The first, to the Romans; then two to the Corinthians; after these, to the Galatians; next, to the Ephesians; then to the Philippians; then to the Colossians; after these, two to the Thessalonians, and that to the Hebrews; and again, two to Timothy; one to Titus; and lastly, that to Philemon. And besides, the Revelation of John.
>
> These are fountains of salvation, that they who thirst may be satisfied with the living words they contain. In these alone is proclaimed the doctrine of godliness. Let no man add to these, neither let him take ought from these. For concerning these the Lord put to shame the Sadducees, and said, 'You err, not knowing the Scriptures.' And He reproved the Jews, saying, 'Search the Scriptures, for these are they that testify of Me.'[10]

From here on out, the extent of the canon is essentially established, especially in the West. Only in the East are there some differences, primarily around Revelation and the other disputed books mentioned by Eusebius.

Gregory of Nazianzus (c. 381–390)

Gregory here represents the Eastern Church. He wrote this canon list in a rhyme form (in Greek) to facilitate memorization of the Scriptures:

> Now immediately count those of the new mystery. Matthew wrote to the Hebrews the wonders of Christ; And Mark to Italy, Luke to Greece; And John to all, a great preacher, one who entered heaven. Then Acts of the wise apostles. Now the ten and four epistles of Paul. And the seven general ones, of which, one of James, and two of Peter, and three of John again; And Jude is seventh. You have all. If there is any outside of these, they are not among the genuine.[11]

Gregory's list ostensibly omits Revelation, though he somewhat alludes to it when he speaks of John as "one who entered heaven." As with Cyril, this 26-book listing reflects the common Eastern opinion of the fourth century.

Augustine of Hippo (397)

Augustine is widely considered the be the most influential theologian of the Western Church. He very often receives the credit for many developments in the

church in the West, as well as much of the blame (depending on whether people like these developments or not!). It is thus not surprising that he too wrote up a list of books that were to be accepted as canonical. In the first part of the list, he provides the canon of the Old Testament, including the Apocrypha. We cite here his list of the New Testament:

> That of the New Testament, again, is contained within the following:— Four books of the Gospel, according to Matthew, according to Mark, according to Luke, according to John; fourteen epistles of the Apostle Paul— one to the Romans, two to the Corinthians, one to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, to the Philippians, two to the Thessalonians, one to the Colossians, two to Timothy, one to Titus, to Philemon, to the Hebrews: two of Peter; three of John; one of Jude; and one of James; one book of the Acts of the Apostles; and one of the Revelation of John.[12]

Augustine was well aware of the continued disputes over some of the peripheral books, whether they were from the Old or the New Testament. Before providing his canon list, he also gives some criteria for adjudicating these disputes, which are quite instructive:

> Now, in regard to the canonical Scriptures, he must follow the judgment of the greater number of Catholic churches; and among these, of course, a high place must be given to such as have been thought worthy to be the seat of an apostle and to receive epistles. Accordingly, among the canonical Scriptures he will judge according to the following standard: to prefer those that are received by all the Catholic churches to those which some do not receive. Among those, again, which are not received by all, he will prefer such as have the sanction of the greater number and those of greater authority, to such as are held by the smaller number and those of less authority. If, however, he shall find that some books are held by the greater number of churches, and others by the churches of greater authority (though this is not a very likely thing to happen), I think that in such a case the authority on the two sides is to be looked upon as equal.[13]

Third Council of Carthage (397)

The Councils of Hippo and Carthage are very often linked together. It is sometimes said that the canon was closed at these councils, though that is giving them too much credit, as we will see below. Of the Council of Hippo (393), no texts have survived, but its decisions concerning what constituted the canon of Scripture were reproduced at the Council of Carthage in 397. In a sense, this council represents one of the final stages in the West in the solidifying of the canon. The council

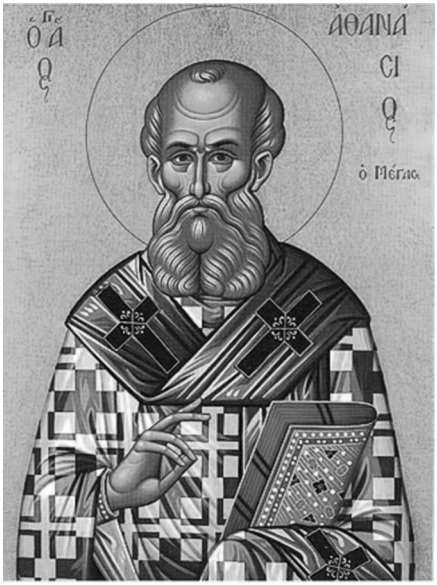


Figure 9.1. An image depicting Athanasius of Alexandria. His 39th Festal Letter is the earliest unambiguous canon list of all 27 New Testament books.

issued a canon of the whole of Scripture, both Old and New Testament, with the Old containing the books of the Apocrypha. Here we list the New Testament:

> Besides the canonical Scriptures, nothing shall be read in church under the name of divine Scriptures. Moreover, the canonical Scriptures are these… The [books of the] New Testament: the Gospels, four books; the Acts of the Apostles, one book; the Epistles of Paul, thirteen; of the same to the Hebrews, one Epistle; of Peter, two; of John, apostle, three; of James, one; of Jude, one; the Revelation of John. Concerning the confirmation of this canon, the transmarine Church shall be consulted. On the anniversaries of martyrs, their acts shall also be read.[14]

While many more canon lists could be cited, we will end our journey here. In the West, the canon was for all intents and purposes solidified. As I am primarily tracing how we came to have the Bible in English as we know it today, and the English Bible stands in the Western tradition, this seems a fitting place to end our citations of canon lists. It is approximately from this time period and onward that the Western and Eastern traditions in the church begin to diverge, and this divergence is also displayed in the canon of Scripture to some extent. At least as far as the Western tradition is concerned, these are the books that we know in our New

Testaments and there has been little serious disagreement from this time until the present.

When Was the Canon Closed and Who Closed It?

Some would say that the canon was closed when Athanasius issued his 39th Festal Letter with a full canon of the New Testament. Others would point to the Councils of Hippo and Carthage (as I myself have done in the past). Yet Athanasius was a single bishop and had no authority to declare the canon closed and, despite ending our journey at the Third Council of Carthage, this council was not an ecumenical council and did not definitively close the canon for all parties. Trying to put a specific date on the "closing" of the canon is difficult to do (perhaps even impossible!) because we cannot find a specific date or event. The difficulty is in trying to define what would constitute the definitive closing of the canon. After the councils of Carthage in 397 and 419, the 27-book canon was the norm in the Western Church, though Metzger warns that "it would be a mistake to represent the question of the canon as finally settled in all Christian communities."[15] While opinion was more uniform in the West, this was not the case in the East. As noted in Cyril and Gregory's canon lists, Revelation was excluded, which was the common practice in the Greek speaking church for quite some time. There are several additional books that were considered to be disputed in the early fourth century and beyond, and which continued to be disputed to varying degrees after the end of the fourth century. These books are James, Jude, 2–3 John, 2 Peter, and Revelation, and we could perhaps also mention Hebrews. The extent of the disagreement can be seen in Eastern canon lists, some of which we have already cited: Cyril of Jerusalem, the Council of Laodicea, the Apostolic Canons,[16] and Gregory of Nazianzus all lack Revelation. Of those that lack more, a fourth-century Syriac canon list has only 19 books, completely dropping all seven Catholic Epistles and Revelation,[17] while the Syriac Peshitta—the Syriac translation of the Scriptures—had only 22 books (it included James) up until the other five were translated and added in 508, but even then, these additional books were "accepted by only the Jacobite (Monophysite) branch of the Syriac church; the Nestorians to this day acknowledge a canon of only twenty-two books."[18] There never was an early ecumenical church council that definitively declared once and for all that "these are the boundaries of Scripture," meaning that small amounts of diversity persisted after the fourth century. The West effectively followed and reaffirmed the decisions of Carthage, but the East never made any statements quite so definitive and it continues to exhibit some diversity down to the present. While there was essential unanimity in the West, it is in fact not until we come to the Council of Florence (1439–1443) that Rome ever issued any formal statement,

and not until the Council of Trent (1546) that we might even point to a definitive statement saying the canon was closed officially, and that only from a Roman Catholic perspective.[19] This latter council, of course, took place after the Reformation and held no authority either for Protestants or for the churches in the East.

Does this therefore imply that the canon of the New Testament was never closed and we could still potentially recognize further authoritative books? By no means. While we cannot speak of a definitive closing of the canon, we can say that its outline was essentially settled during the fourth century. This outline was largely without debate in the West, and the debates in the East concerned only those disputed books that would round out the canon to 27. After the fourth, and perhaps even after the mid-third century, for the majority of Christians, there was not really a question of whether there would be more than 27 books in the New Testament canon, for these were the only books that had any legitimate claim to apostolic authority. What we can say is that, for all intents and purposes, debate over the edges of the canon largely ceased sometime during the fourth century and was virtually a settled matter during the fifth as far as the vast majority of the church was concerned. So who can we say closed the canon? We really can't point to anyone, whether a specific figure or church council. These 27 books are the ones that the church received as handed down from the apostles, and any decisions made about them simply reflected what had been the reality within the life of the church. There never was a conscious decision to either choose the books of the canon or to close it; the canon is the heritage that the church received from the apostles.

Conclusion

The core canon of the New Testament was widely accepted by the end of the second century and enjoyed universal acceptance in the third (if we leave aside Hebrews and Revelation). Debate swirled around the edges, but it would seem at some point during the third century those edges were essentially defined as only possibly containing the disputed books; there was no real question over any others by this time. These edges hardened in the West at some point during the fourth century, and since we stand in the Western tradition, we can point to this period as when the canon of the New Testament was for all intents and purposes finally established. These 27 books were certainly functionally canonical during the fourth century, and by the time we come to the fifth century, it is probably fair to say that we had moved into the stage that we are in today with understanding the New Testament as a fixed list of books. Disputes in the East are not unimportant or insignificant, but we should also acknowledge that the Eastern churches share a different tradition than the one we are familiar with as Protestants in the West.

Further Reading

Gallagher, Edmon L. and John D. Meade. *The Biblical Canon Lists from Early Christianity: Texts and Analysis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Metzger, Bruce M. *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.

10.
The Disputed Books

The core of the canon was well established by the middle or end of the second century, but the edges of the canon remained fuzzy for a time afterwards. Even by the early fourth century, Eusebius of Caesarea still listed five (or six books) as disputed: James, Jude, 1–2 John, 2 Peter, and Revelation. While these disputes made little difference in the West, they affected the Eastern Church for quite some time. In this chapter, we will take a closer look at these disputed books, why they were disputed, and how we should best think of them today in light of these historical disputes.

Eusebius's List of Disputed Books

We have already cited the canon list of Eusebius of Caesarea, but for the sake of clarity in this chapter, we present it again to set the stage for our discussion:

> Since we are dealing with this subject it is proper to sum up the writings of the New Testament which have been already mentioned. First then must be put the holy quaternion of the Gospels; following them the Acts of the Apostles. After this must be reckoned the epistles of Paul; next in order the extant former epistle of John, and likewise the epistle of Peter, must be maintained. After them is to be placed, if it really seem proper, the Apocalypse of John, concerning

> which we shall give the different opinions at the proper time. These then belong among the accepted writings.
>
> Among the disputed writings, which are nevertheless recognized by many, are extant the so-called epistle of James and that of Jude, also the second epistle of Peter, and those that are called the second and third of John, whether they belong to the evangelist or to another person of the same name.
>
> Among the rejected writings must be reckoned also the Acts of Paul, and the so-called Shepherd, and the Apocalypse of Peter, and in addition to these the extant epistle of Barnabas, and the so-called Teachings of the Apostles; and besides, as I said, the Apocalypse of John, if it seem proper, which some, as I said, reject, but which others class with the accepted books. And among these some have placed also the Gospel according to the Hebrews, with which those of the Hebrews that have accepted Christ are especially delighted. And all these may be reckoned among the disputed books.[1]

Before we proceed further, we must make some brief notes about Eusebius's three categories. The books that are accepted are those that, in Greek, are termed *homolegoumena:* "confessed" or "acknowledged." The disputed books translate the word *antilegomena*, that is, "spoken against." The rejected books (sometimes also translated as "spurious") are *notha,* which could also be translated as "illegitimate." The books that Eusebius categorizes as accepted are those that we have previously referred to as the core canon; these books never had serious dispute and were received quite early. The problem with Eusebius's ordering here is that the lines between *antilegomena* (disputed) and *notha* (spurious) are blurred: he lists each category, and then lumps all of them back together as "the disputed books." Bruce Metzger explains these categories in the sense that the *antilegomena* category refers to those books that are orthodox and canonical yet disputed, while the *notha* category refers to those books that are orthodox yet not canonical.[2] Eusebius says that the books he considers to be *antilegomena* are "recognized by many." This indicates some form of wide acceptance—though he was aware of disputes—which supports the idea that he effectively would have viewed them as disputed canonical books. The *notha* books would thus be those that have no wide acceptance and perhaps constitute a minority view—though Revelation being listed here makes this category more convoluted.

With these initial comments out of the way, we will look at each book in turn, noting how early we can see its recognition and at what point in time it seems to gain this majority status. Since Revelation is something of a special case, we will start our discussion with it and then proceed to the other smaller books.

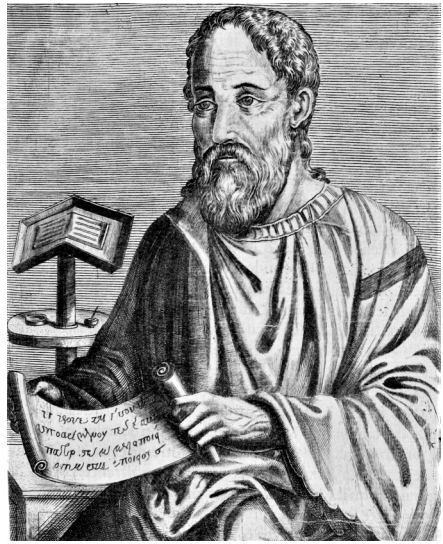


Figure 10.1. An image depicting Eusebius of Caesarea, who is known as the "Father of Church History." He preserves much testimony regarding the canon of the New Testament.

Revelation

The canonization process for Revelation is by far the most unique of all of the New Testament books.[3] As we saw in Chapter 8, it had very early and widespread acceptance during the second century and into the third. If its authority was so widely recognized, what led to it becoming disputed and then largely neglected in the Eastern churches? How could Eusebius come to have such a low opinion of it to even include it amongst the rejected writings? As best we can tell, we can probably chalk the origins of doubt up to theological disputes.

It seems that the main problem was a dispute over eschatology and controversies with fringe groups. Many church fathers in the second century were known as chiliasts—that is, they held to a future earthly thousand-year reign of Christ. Sometime during the third century, this understanding fell out of favor and a more spiritual understanding of Revelation became dominant. The chiliast view was largely deemed to be too earthly-minded and perhaps even tainted by Jewish thought.[4] It seems quite likely that Eusebius's own theological bias against chiliasm partially accounts for his dislike of Revelation. At one point when recounting some of the traditions of Papias and his chiliasm, Eusebius makes a rather disparaging remark about his intelligence:

> The same writer [Papias] gives also other accounts which he says came to him through unwritten tradition, certain

> strange parables and teachings of the Saviour, and some other more mythical things. To these belong his statement that there will be a period of some thousand years after the resurrection of the dead, and that the kingdom of Christ will be set up in material form on this very earth. I suppose he got these ideas through a misunderstanding of the apostolic accounts, not perceiving that the things said by them were spoken mystically in figures. For he appears to have been of very limited understanding, as one can see from his discourses. But it was due to him that so many of the Church Fathers after him adopted a like opinion, urging in their own support the antiquity of the man; as for instance Irenaeus and any one else that may have proclaimed similar views.[5]

The origin of some of the disputes may come from an overreaction against Montanism, a visionary movement also known as the "New Prophecy" and the "Phrygian heresy," which derived its more well-known name from its founder, Montanus. Opposed to this movement was a presbyter from Rome named Gaius (active c. 200). He appears to have gone so far in his opposition as to suggest that Revelation was written by the arch-heretic Cerinthus:

> But Cerinthus also, by means of revelations which he pretends were written by a great apostle, brings before us marvelous things which he falsely claims were shown him by angels; and he says that after the resurrection the kingdom of Christ will be set up on earth, and that the flesh dwelling in Jerusalem will again be subject to desires and pleasures. And being an enemy of the Scriptures of God, he asserts, with the purpose of deceiving men, that there is to be a period of a thousand years for marriage festivals.[6]

While it is not entirely clear whether this implies that Gaius took issue with Revelation and claimed that Cerinthus wrote it, some have understood him to be doing exactly this.[7] At the very least, he was opposed to chiliasm and linked a form of this belief to Cerinthus.

In all probability, the figure most responsible for Eusebius's antipathy toward Revelation is Dionysius of Alexandria (died 264). During the third century, a dispute arose over chiliasm, instigated by one Nepos, who was a bishop in Egypt and had written a commentary on Revelation promoting a chiliastic interpretation of it. Dionysius took issue with Nepos promoting this type of interpretation and wrote a response to him. One of Dionysius's reasons for his opposition is that he says that "schisms and apostasies of entire churches have resulted" because of adherence to chiliasm.[8] In his argumentation against Nepos, Dionysius raised the

specter of previous individuals who had completely rejected Revelation on the grounds that it was the work of Cerinthus the heretic:

> Some before us have set aside and rejected the book altogether, criticising it chapter by chapter, and pronouncing it without sense or argument, and maintaining that the title is fraudulent. For they say that it is not the work of John, nor is it a revelation, because it is covered thickly and densely by a vail of obscurity. And they affirm that none of the apostles, and none of the saints, nor any one in the Church is its author, but that Cerinthus, who founded the sect which was called after him the Cerinthian, desiring reputable authority for his fiction, prefixed the name. For the doctrine which he taught was this: that the kingdom of Christ will be an earthly one. And as he was himself devoted to the pleasures of the body and altogether sensual in his nature, he dreamed that that kingdom would consist in those things which he desired, namely, in the delights of the belly and of sexual passion; that is to say, in eating and drinking and marrying, and in festivals and sacrifices and the slaying of victims, under the guise of which he thought he could indulge his appetites with a better grace.[9]

We can see some form of correspondence between what Dionysius writes and what Gaius had earlier written, though whether there is any dependence is unclear. What is clear is that Dionysius casts some aspersions upon Revelation based upon the opinions of these earlier reactionaries. Yet Dionysius could not reject Revelation and set it aside, for "many brethren hold it in high esteem."[10] While he would not reject it, he argued against a literal interpretation of Revelation and then proceeded to present arguments as to why he could not accept that it was written by John the son of Zebedee, though he did not deny that a John—whoever that John may be—had written it, nor that Revelation was "the work of a holy and inspired man."[11] In a lengthy excerpt preserved by Eusebius, Dionysius presented arguments on stylistic grounds why this John could not be the same figure as the John who wrote the Gospel or the first Epistle of John, but was rather some other John.[12] This argument from Dionysius seems to have greatly influenced Eusebius, who shared Dionysius's view regarding eschatology. Given the way that Eusebius spoke of Revelation, he appears to have been personally uncomfortable with it and would have preferred to leave it out of the canonical books but had to acknowledge that it had been widely accepted prior to the time of Dionysius.

The disputes that arose around Revelation were not truly related to any historical issues regarding the book or whether it had been written by John the apostle. The doubts about John's authorship are quite late comparatively, and the

motivation for downplaying John's authorship seems to arise more from an environment of theological dispute. Thus, despite the fact that Revelation would long be rejected and ignored in the East, and even still is generally not as well regarded there, we can very confidently affirm its full canonical status and its wide and early acceptance well before these later objections.

The Catholic Epistles

It would seem that the largest reason that James, 2 Peter, 2–3 John, and Jude were disputed is that they were not well known. This is hardly surprising, as these books are quite small, especially the final three. By way of comparison, how often have you ever heard a sermon from 2 or 3 John or heard them quoted? If we were to base our canon on quotations or sermons alone, we would probably have to conclude that those books were not canonical. Within the canon of the New Testament, there is a real sense in which some books are very influential (think Romans or John), while others tend to exert such little influence to the point that you may be forgiven for forgetting they exist (3 John or Philemon). This seems to be the case with these five books, which makes tracing how widely or how early they were known to be difficult, because they are hardly ever quoted. An absence of a quotation does not speak to ignorance or rejection, particularly in light of how small of a glimpse second-century writings actually give us into that world, but it does make the task difficult for ascertaining when these writings began to gain wider acceptance. While they were not often cited, these books apparently became quite widespread, even if we cannot completely trace this process very clearly. Though Eusebius classes them as disputed, they were "nevertheless recognized by many,"[13] so knowledge of and acceptance of these writings obviously spread. In them, their apostolic origin and authority was recognized by a significant portion of the church, such that this eventually became the majority opinion by the end of the fourth century.

In the second century, there are very few direct quotes and little evidence of knowledge of the disputed Catholic Epistles. As far as citations are concerned, James is quoted by Irenaeus, though not by name;[14] Polycarp likely knows 2 John,[15] as does Irenaeus,[16] while Irenaeus possibly also cites 3 John;[17] Clement of Alexandria made comments on Jude;[18] and 2 Peter is not once directly quoted by name in any known extant source, though Justin Martyr makes an allusion that seems to come from it.[19] As far as knowledge goes in the second century, the Muratorian Fragment (as noted above) knows of Jude and 2 John, while Clement of Alexandria perhaps knew of all of the disputed books and wrote commentaries on them; as Eusebius said, "[Clement] has given in the Hypotyposes abridged accounts of all canonical Scripture, not omitting the disputed books,—I refer to

Jude and the other Catholic epistles, and Barnabas and the so-called Apocalypse of Peter."[20] Given Eusebius's labeling of these catholic epistles as the "disputed books," it seems reasonable to suppose that he had all of these in mind when speaking of Clement's writings.

There are more references to these writings in the third century, but they also show varied opinions which account for why they were considered disputed into the fourth century. James is accepted by Origen,[21] but he also gives a slight indication that not all accepted the epistle in his day.[22] The epistles of 2–3 John are also known by Origen and Dionysius of Alexandria (though the latter does not believe they were written by John the apostle), while 2 John is known by Hippolytus of Rome and Cyprian of Carthage. Where we find knowledge of 2 John, it is not unreasonable to suppose that knowledge of 3 John followed. As Charles Hill has argued, the inclusion of these tiny epistles in a Johannine corpus best explains their survival and inclusion in the canon; if they were not appended to other works of John, it would be difficult to explain their individual circulation.[23] As for Jude, it was accepted by Tertullian[24] and Origen.[25]

We will reserve some special comment for 2 Peter, for of all books of the New Testament canon, this one is the most weakly attested and probably also most contested. In the fourth century, Eusebius commented that the first epistle of Peter was fully acknowledged and undisputed, but "we have learned that his extant second Epistle does not belong to the canon; yet, as it has appeared profitable to many, it has been used with the other Scriptures."[26] As Michael Kruger has summed up its status, "It was received into the New Testament canon with hesitation, considered second-class Scripture by Luther, reluctantly accepted by Calvin, rejected by Erasmus, and now is repudiated as pseudonymous by modern scholarship."[27] We have noted that there are no explicit citations of 2 Peter in the second century and that its usage in the third century is quite minimal. So what evidence exists that it really is an early epistle originating from the apostle Peter and not a later pseudonymous writing? Origen is the first to explicitly quote 2 Peter; he mentions the epistle is doubted by some,[28] but he appears to fully accept its authority[29] and quotes it six times.[30] Origen's usage points to the writing being far earlier than his day. There is circumstantial evidence that Clement of Alexandria,[31] Irenaeus,[32] and Justin[33] all knew and at least alluded to it. The apocryphal Apocalypse of Peter (c. 110) appears to show knowledge of 2 Peter, and there are slight hints that 1 Clement (c. 95) was influenced by it.[34] Though it is difficult to find much evidence of use for 2 Peter, Kruger comments that "it is important to remember that 2 Peter still has significantly more support for its inclusion in the canon than the best of those books that have been rejected."[35]

Whatever the exact process was by which these writings came to be recognized, they evidently spread during the second and third centuries enough to the extent that they were the only books apart from the canonical core to have any legitimate claim to apostolic authority during the fourth century. We must remember that we only have a dim picture, and until canon lists began to be drawn up with some frequency in the fourth century, we do not know the extent of any specific writer's knowledge of the New Testament writings. We make deductions based on how the writings were used, but we cannot make any definitive statements based upon the silence of authors on certain books. There are many reasons why a book might not be quoted often, and we should keep that in mind when we look at the development of the New Testament canon and the comparatively slim testimony for the disputed books.

Conclusion: What Do We Do With the Disputed Books?

That books of the New Testament were disputed up until the fourth century and beyond may be both surprising and disconcerting. This is not something that we want to hide or downplay so as to not damage the faith of other believers; I would contend it is more damaging when believers find out that something of this nature was hidden and have no good explanation for what the disputes meant or their implications. It only serves to make them more vulnerable to the sensationalistic ideas that the canon was arbitrarily chosen sometime in the fourth century, which we have shown to be utterly fallacious. We want to freely acknowledge that these disputes existed and wrestle with how we should approach them.

As a first point, I want to say that if this causes you to have doubts about the books and to not view them as having the same authority as the rest of the books of the New Testament, you are not alone. We saw that many in the East had lingering doubts about Revelation and sometimes the other disputed books, and so they did not use them. This is also true in the period of the Reformation when we look at how Martin Luther handled some of the disputed books. Granted, he tended to have different reasons, but he effectively diminished the authority of several books of the New Testament. In his translation of the New Testament into German, he numbered all of the books of the New Testament up until he came to books he considered disputed. When it came to Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation, he set them aside at the end of the Bible and did not give them a number, making his numbering of the New Testament only 23. In his preface to Hebrews, he says, "Hitherto we have had the right certain chief books of the New Testament. The four following had, in ancient times, a different reputation."[36] Luther made various comments about his opinion of these books, quite famously saying that James, in comparison to the books that most clearly show Christ (like Romans

or Galatians), "is really an epistle of straw, compared to them; for it has nothing of the nature of the Gospel about it,"[37] though he also said he thought highly of James even if it was "rejected by the ancients" and even though he considered it to be "not the writing of any apostle."[38] Of Revelation, he said he left "everyone free to hold his own ideas," but he tended to think of it as "neither apostolic nor prophetic."[39] Luther came to various terms with these books, but effectively he set up a hierarchy of authority within the New Testament and viewed their value accordingly. There are ways in which we naturally do something similar to this with some of the disputed books due to their size. Jude is usually not all that influential for most of us, and neither is 2 or 3 John. This is not necessarily a conscious action but stems from the reality of the books themselves.

Second, I want to highlight once again that a universally recognized core canon existed by the end of the second century and likely even during the middle of it. To see disputes around these books up until the fourth century and beyond is not to diminish the authority or certainty of the core canon. Just because people were not settled upon whether James or 2 Peter carried authority does not mean they lacked certainty about the Gospels or Paul's epistles.

Third, if you find yourself facings doubts about these disputed books, I would encourage you to remember that very little doctrine stands or falls on the disputed books, Revelation included (even though I would consider Revelation to be an unfairly disputed book). When we speak of doctrine, we draw primarily from the undisputed core books, and these peripheral books more often provide additional support rather than the basic grounding. In some ways, we could compare these disputed books to how we might think of Esther, Song of Songs, or Ecclesiastes. If we were to lose those books from the Old Testament, how much do we ultimately lose, doctrinally speaking? Next to nothing, because they are not foundational to how we understand God and his interaction with the world. We can speak of the disputed New Testament books in much the same way; if we were to lose them, we lose little in terms of doctrine. We lose nuance, yes, but the Christian faith is not left in tatters. If the second-century church could know right doctrine primarily using the core canon, then I think we can as well.

Fourth, I would encourage you to trust God's providence. Do you believe that God guides human affairs and has arranged matters so that we have the words that he wanted us to have? Do you trust that God would have guided the church to recognize the books that he gave to be used as authoritative guides? From a historical standpoint, I freely admit that we cannot have the same level of certainty regarding the disputed books as we can for the core books, but we can trust the providence of God to give us what he wanted us to have and to guide the

church in its recognition of apostolic authority. If that is true, then we can trust these books as well as the very Word of God.

Further Reading

Kruger, Michael J. *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012.

II.
The Rejected Books

Perhaps one of the things our culture is most fascinated with when it comes to the Bible is the idea of "lost books" of the Bible. Many writings abound that play into this notion, touting how these "lost" books increase our knowledge of what Christianity was really all about. On the back cover of *The Lost Books of the Bible*, for example, we read this marketing tagline:

> Rediscovered in modern times, these "non-canonical" gospels, epistles, and other pieces were excised from the standard Bible by various church councils in the first four centuries of the Christian Era. Here, among other texts, are writings describing the girlhood and betrothal of Mary and her life before Christ's birth; the childhood of Jesus, as described by Peter and Nicodemus; and the appearance of Christ before the gates of Hell, from whence he leads Adam and the saints to Paradise. … An essential resource for the study of biblical history and theology, this authentic presentation of the "lost" Scriptures can be enjoyed for its beauty and directness, while also adding to one's understanding of life in Judea during the first century A.D.[1]

It is a popular (and perhaps exciting) idea to suggest that books were "excised" from the New Testament and that we only have those books that the authorities wanted. As the idea goes, these books were all once part of the Bible; what we have is basically a trimmed down version that the powers that be determined should be the Bible. As we have seen, particularly in our examination of the core canon, this

is an untenable view of the formation of the canon, popular though it may be. In this chapter, we will look at those rejected orthodox books that have the best claim to being called "contenders" for inclusion in the New Testament canon. We will also look at some of those heretical "lost" books that get bandied about as representing "alternative" forms of Christianity and will seek to demystify them, making it plain why they were never considered to be authoritative by anyone in the church catholic.

Rejected Orthodox Books

There are certain books that have been said to have been "considered" for the canon of Scripture. While it is true that certain Christians seem to have viewed specific writings outside of the New Testament as authoritative, it would be a mistake to say they were "considered" for the canon of Scripture, since conscious consideration never came into the canonization process. Some of these were functionally canonical for small portions of the church or by specific individuals, but there never existed any wide consensus over them. While there are a few more books that could be mentioned, I will briefly discuss some of the more popular "contenders" that were ultimately not recognized as canonical. In our discussion, it should be remembered that the core canon was essentially universally accepted during the second century, and so these books were those that floated on the still fuzzy edges of the canon.

1 Clement

We have had reason to refer to 1 Clement on multiple occasions due to its witness to the development of the New Testament canon. A letter written from the church in Rome to the church in Corinth around the year 95 after Corinth had done away with its elders, it was highly valued by the church in the early centuries and was one of the most valued writings outside of the New Testament. The valuing of this epistle does not appear to have come with any great claims to authority, however. Irenaeus clearly viewed it as a valuable epistle, especially as it bore witness to the apostolic teaching present at the church in Rome, but it seems doubtful that he put it on the same level as the apostolic writings.[2] The only figure who appears to elevate this letter to the level of the apostolic writings is Clement of Alexandria, who called the author "the Apostle Clement" before citing a passage from it.[3] Eusebius records that "this epistle also has been publicly used in a great many churches both in former times and in our own,"[4] and later makes mention of its use in Dionysius's church in Alexandria.[5] What is noteworthy about this testimony of Eusebius is that he does not mention it as either one of the disputed or spurious books, suggesting that this usage was customary rather than a reflection

of authority. The only instance we see where 1 Clement is explicitly considered to be canonical is in the late fourth century canon list of the Apostolic Canons, which lists 1 and 2 Clement alongside the New Testament. The Apostolic Canons also includes its own writings in its list, making this something of an outlier.[6] It has been suggested that 1 Clement was considered canonical due to its inclusion in Codex Alexandrinus, along with 2 Clement, after the writings of the New Testament, but this is inconclusive at best. Inclusion in a biblical codex is not necessarily evidence of authority, but it does show that this epistle was highly valued. It would thus seem that the high value placed on 1 Clement did not raise it to the level of being apostolic or authoritative in the eyes of most of the church. Its widespread usage did not put it on the level of the disputed books of the New Testament nor does it appear to have been a "contender" for inclusion in the canon.

The Shepherd of Hermas

The Shepherd of Hermas is a rather lengthy book consisting of five visions given to a man named Hermas, dating from about the middle of the second century. In terms of popularity, it would seem that it was one of the most popular early Christian writings. This is evidenced in material remains, for there are more extant manuscripts from the first five centuries of it than all books of the New Testament with the exception of Matthew and John.[7] It is also found in Codex Sinaiticus after the canonical books. Did this popularity mean that the Shepherd was afforded authoritative status? In certain circles, the answer to this would have to be "yes." Irenaeus cites it once and likely referred to it as Scripture;[8] Eusebius considered him to have done so, for he says that Irenaeus received it as Scripture.[9] Clement of Alexandria quoted from the Shepherd at multiple points,[10] while the other notable Alexandrian scholar Origen considered it to be inspired.[11] It should be noted that both Clement and Origen are known for using many writings outside of the canonical Scriptures, though Origen in particular elsewhere seems well aware of the commonly accepted writings of the New Testament (see Chapter 9). Given this awareness, it does not seem likely that he would have necessarily placed the Shepherd on the same level as the canonical books.

That the book was used in an authoritative manner by some is beyond dispute, but that does not therefore lead to the conclusion that it was widely viewed as authoritative. The Muratorian Fragment indicates that it was rejected as authoritative on the grounds that it was written too recently and thus did not trace back to the apostles. Tertullian reports that the *Shepherd* was counted by "every council of Churches… among apocryphal and false (writings)."[12] Granted, however, Tertullian made this statement after joining the Montanist movement and had previously accepted it; he seems to have opposed it on the grounds that he

thought it morally lax, calling it the "'Shepherd' of adulterers."[13] In addition to Origen's usage of and respect for the Shepherd, Origen is aware that there are some who "despised" the work as well.[14] Eusebius's listing of it as spurious indicates it was not widely received in his time, while Athanasius listed it alongside the Old Testament Apocrypha as one of the books that are useful "to be read by those who newly join us, and who wish for instruction in the word of godliness."[15] Though the Shepherd of Hermas was popular, we find no wide consensus regarding its authority, a lack of apostolic origins, that it was never included in any canon lists, and that what regard did exist seems to have petered out during the third century.

The Epistle of Barnabas

An early second century theological treatise dealing with Christians' relation to Jews and to the Old Testament, the Epistle of Barnabas is included in the collection of writings known as the Apostolic Fathers. Though the letter does not name Barnabas as its author, it has often been attributed to him, which surely contributed to its standing with some Christians. Clement of Alexandria is once again the primary figure who appears to have regarded the Epistle of Barnabas as authoritative, as he wrote a commentary on it[16] and believed it indeed to have been written by Barnabas.[17] Origen also seems to have regarded it with some authority,[18] though likely of a lesser kind as it is never mentioned in any of his canon lists. Tertullian reports that the Epistle of Barnabas was "more generally received among the Churches than that apocryphal 'Shepherd' of adulterers,"[19] which seems to be more of a shot at the Shepherd of Hermas than anything else. It was still valued in the fourth century, being included in Codex Sinaiticus after the canonical books, a placement which suggests the book was esteemed but not considered authoritative. Jerome also considered the epistle to be truly from Barnabas and to be "valuable for the edification of the church," but the book was still "reckoned among the apocryphal writings."[20] Otherwise, there is little to suggest Barnabas was ever "contending" for a place in the canon. It was never included in any canon lists and never enjoyed a widely acknowledged authoritative or apostolic status.

Apocalypse of Peter

Not to be confused with the heretical writing of the same name, this Apocalypse of Peter is an early second-century writing which reports visions of paradise and detailed descriptions of the torment of the damned. In form, it is similar to Dante's *Divine Comedy* and may have served as the basis for this later work. We know of its usage in the second century from the Muratorian Fragment, which says, "We

receive only the apocalypses of John and Peter, though some of us are not willing that the latter be read in church." Clement of Alexandria quoted it as Scripture[21] and wrote a commentary on it.[22] Eusebius listed it as one of the spurious books since he knew of it used by some but rejected by most. Elsewhere he says no ecclesiastical writer used it.[23] The later church historian Sozomen (c. 400 – c. 450) wrote, "the book entitled 'The Apocalypse of Peter,' which was considered altogether spurious by the ancients, is still read in some of the churches of Palestine,"[24] indicating limited usage into the fifth century, though majority rejection prior to then. Outside of the Muratorian Fragment, this book never finds itself in any canon lists and its acceptance always appears to have been limited.

The Epistle to the Laodiceans

Two writings known as Paul's Epistle to the Laodiceans have existed. The earlier version was condemned by the Muratorian Fragment as a Marcionite forgery, which we do not concern ourselves with here. The other one was a likely third-century production that found some popularity in the West. It is quite short and unobjectionable, being a patchwork of quotations from Paul, largely from Philippians, though the epistle itself is decidedly not originally from Paul. In the fourth century, Jerome says that some read the epistle, "but it is rejected by everyone,"[25] while the later Second Council of Nicaea (787) rejected it. Despite its universal rejection, it was popular privately in the West and many Latin biblical manuscripts include it. This makes it an interesting case showing that non-canonical books could be quite popular and even copied right alongside canonical books; we should ensure that we do not conflate popularity with authority.

Summary

If any book had a claim to be a "contender" to be in the canon, it would have been one of these books. Some of them did enjoy essentially Scriptural status for a time in certain areas of the church, but this functional authority never became widespread. Christians had an awareness—even if an incomplete one—of which writings bore authority and which did not. While highly valuing a number of additional books, they did not recognize within them the same apostolic authority as the canonical books. Most of these are certainly still valuable and give us insight into early Christian thought and theology, but they never bore the apostolic marks nor had the apostolic origins that the canonical books had. These were not suppressed—they were in fact very popular—but simply noted as not being on the same level as the apostolic writings. No widespread consensus ever developed around these books; even the apparently poorly attested book of 2 Peter still has better bona fides than these other "contenders."

Rejected Heretical Books

While there were other books that were used and valued by the church, they are not the ones that garner the most interest in the present. No, that distinction belongs to the "lost" Gospels and other "lost" writings, particularly those found at Nag Hammadi in 1945. One of the main reasons that these writings are given the time of day that they are is the overriding presentation of Christianity as being incredibly diverse in the earliest period, such that we cannot speak of a single Christianity, but of "Christianities." According to this school of thought, the various heretical groups, such as the Ebionites, Marcionites, or Valentinians, do not represent a divergence from orthodox Christian belief because there was no such thing as orthodoxy at the time. It was only later, after the councils and development of creeds in the fourth century, that the views of the "proto-orthodox" came to define Christianity and orthodoxy as we know it today. What we know as Christianity is only the legacy of the theological winners; those other groups were simply the losers and unfairly branded heretics. And if those heretical groups represent just as valid a form of Christianity as what is commonly called orthodoxy, then their writings were just as valid and could have potentially ended up in the canon had history played out differently. As Bart Ehrman rather provocatively puts it,

> But where did this book [the New Testament] come from? It came from the victory of the proto-orthodox. What if another group had won? What if the New Testament contained not Jesus' Sermon on the Mount but the Gnostic teachings Jesus delivered to his disciples after his resurrection? What if it contained not the letters of Paul and Peter but the letters of Ptolemy and Barnabas? What if it contained not the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John but the Gospels of Thomas, Philip, Mary, and Nicodemus? Or what if it did not exist at all?[26]

Now it is absolutely true that there was great diversity during the second century, but does that therefore make all of the diverse groups just as valid? Often overlooked in this idea of diversity is that there certainly was a form of Christianity that had very ancient roots. Also often ignored is the fact that the New Testament writings, especially Paul's epistles, represent the earliest form of Christianity that existed. If these writings represent the earliest form of Christianity, then those that are in continuity with them would be the most legitimate form of Christianity. These "lost" writings are all second-century or later, and these other groups were simply not compatible with the earliest form of Christianity that we know.

Most of these "lost" writings are termed *Gnostic*, though this term is incredibly broad. There is no such thing as Gnosticism itself, but various beliefs that have

been grouped under the broad heading of Gnosticism. They are quite diverse, thus it is difficult to speak with precision in a way that represents the range of beliefs that existed. Since this is the case, and because this is not a church history book nor a book of historical theology, I cannot go into any great depth. But since evaluating these books involves a general understanding of how much this thought diverged from orthodox Christianity, I will give a general overview of a common Gnostic cosmology.[27]

In the Gnostic scheme, there is a single absolute being who is absolutely unknowable; it is sometimes called the Monad, and for simplicity I will use this term here. At some point, the Monad emanated other divine beings from itself, and these divine beings emanated other divine beings from themselves, in a sense becoming less divine as the chain went. These beings were known as Aeons. The number of beings could vary; in Valentinianism, there were fifteen pairs of emanations, resulting in thirty Aeons, while there could be up to 365, as there were for Basilides. Together, this group of Aeons made up a realm known as the Pleroma (Fullness). In some systems of Gnostic thought, such as is found in the Apocryphon of John, the youngest Aeon, Sophia (Wisdom), attempted to emanate another being on her own without her male Aeon partner, and this resulted in a malformed and lower being, who came to be named Yaltabaoth. This Yaltabaoth is a malevolent being who in turn became the creator of the material world. Creation is thus an accident and the material world is neither good nor desirable. No matter what its name, the creator of the world is considered to be a demiurge, a lower god-like being. God in the Old Testament is identified with Yaltabaoth or whoever the demiurge was deemed to be depending on the system. There is thus a strict separation between the God of the Old Testament and of the New Testament, as well as between the material world and the spiritual world—a perspective known as dualism. Salvation is thus thought of in terms of escape from the prison of the material world and returning to the spiritual world.

Now if you had a hard time following or understanding what was even going on, that is hardly surprising. This whole way of thinking is completely alien to Christianity's apostolic origins. And this is only from a very brief description of some teachings that are found amongst the Gnostic groups, and it is these groups that the "lost" writings primarily derive from. In what follows, I will survey some of the more notable "lost" books and provide some representative excerpts to show what these books taught in their own words. In so doing, I hope to demystify them a bit. As we examine them, keep these facts also in mind: the earliest Christians accepted the writings of the Old Testament, believed in one God, believed that the one God was the good Creator of the material world, and confessed that Jesus came in the flesh. As we look at excerpts from these books, note where they

diverge from these very basic beliefs that go back to the earliest Christians, and then ask whether these books could be reconciled with these beliefs.[28] Also consider the general tone of the books; we will find that they sound rather esoteric and are simply out of step with the general tenor of the New Testament writings.

The Gospel of Thomas

Of all of the "lost" Gospels, the Gospel of Thomas is probably the darling of people who promote the idea that these other Gospels were all just as valid as any other. It presents itself as containing "the secret sayings of the living Jesus, which the living Jesus spoke and which Didymos Thomas wrote down."[29] It is typically dated to sometime in the second century. While the title of *Gospel* probably conjures up the image of a writing similar to the canonical Gospels (narrative and teaching), the Gospel of Thomas forgoes any narrative structure whatsoever. Rather than being a coherent work, it is instead a collection of 114 different sayings of Jesus, some of which are basically parallel with what we see in the canonical Gospels, others which we do not find and are not inherently objectionable, and others which suggest Gnostic tinges. For an example, consider saying 20 and compare it against Mark 4:30–32:

> The disciples said to Jesus, "Tell us what the kingdom of heaven is like." He said to them, "It's like a mustard seed. It is the smallest of all seeds. But when it falls on tilled soil, it produces a great plant and becomes a shelter for birds of the sky" (20).

There are various sayings of this sort that closely resemble the teachings of Jesus found in the canonical Gospels. But others are esoteric in nature:

> Jesus saw infants being suckled. He said to his disciples, "These infants being suckled are like those who enter the kingdom." They said to him, "Shall we then, as children, enter the kingdom?" Jesus said to them, "When you make the two one, and when you make the inside like the outside and the outside like the inside, and the above like the below, and when you make the male and the female one and the same, so that the male not be male nor the female female; and when you fashion eyes in the place of an eye, and a hand in place of a hand, and a foot in place of a foot, and a likeness in place of a likeness; then will you enter [the kingdom] (22).

Perhaps its most infamous quote is the final saying:

> Simon Peter said to him, "Let Mary leave us, for women are not worthy of life." Jesus said, "I myself shall lead her in order to make her male, so that she too may become a living

> spirit resembling you males. For every woman who will make herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven" (114).

This Gospel was known to various church fathers, such as Hippolytus,[30] Origen,[31] Eusebius,[32] and Cyril of Jerusalem,[33] who each named this as a heretical Gospel. It is undoubtedly these esoteric elements that parallel some forms of Gnosticism that marked it out as heretical. We know of no one outside of Gnostic circles who used the Gospel of Thomas.

The Gospel of Judas

The structure of the Gospel of Judas also does not truly fit with the structure that we would expect from a work called a Gospel. It is a partially fragmentary series of dialogues between Jesus and the twelve disciples and between Jesus and Judas. Judas is presented as the most enlightened disciple and the only one to whom Jesus commits his secret teaching:

> Jesus said to them, "How are [you] acquainted with me? Truly I say to you, no race from the people among you will be acquainted with me." When his disciples heard this, [they] began to get irritated and angry and to blaspheme against him in their heart. But when Jesus saw their foolishness, [he said] to them, "Why has agitation brought anger (to you)? Your god who is within you and [. . .] have become irritated, along with your souls. [Let] the one who is [stable] among you people bring forward the perfect human being and also stand before my face." And they all said, "We are mighty!" But their spirit could not dare to stand before him—except for Judas Iscariot. He was able to stand before him, but he could not look him in the eyes. Instead, he turned his face away. Judas said to him, "I know who you are and where you have come from. You have come from the aeon of the Barbelo, the immortal (aeon). But as for the one that sent you, I am not worthy to proclaim its name." Jesus, because he knew that he was thinking about the rest of the exalted matters as well, said to him, "Separate from them, and I will tell you the mysteries of the kingdom, not so that you might go there, but so that you might groan all the more" (34–35).[34]

Much of the writing is taken up with a distinctively Gnostic cosmology, one in which we find successions of Aeons as in Valentinianism. The world and humanity are the creation of one of these Aeons, named Saklas:

> Next Saklas said to his angels, 'Let us create a human being according to the likeness and according to the image.' Then they modelled Adam and his wife Eve, but she is called in the cloud 'Life' (Zoe). For it is in this name (Adam) that all

> the races seek him, and each one of them calls her by their names (54).

The text is again very esoteric and comes from a completely different worldview than what we see in the Old or New Testament. This text may date to the second century and finds no usage outside of the Gnostic groups. There is little question why it was rejected by the orthodox, for its cosmology alone puts it out of step with orthodoxy.

The Gospel of Philip

The Gospel of Philip contains a surprisingly small amount of material about Jesus for a "Gospel." It also does not include any narrative structure and contains only a few direct quotations or sayings attributed to Jesus: seventeen, of which nine are parallel to the canonical Gospels. It seems it is a compilation that does not necessarily have a coherent structure, as it contains many different themes and rambles from one topic to the next. At points, it explicitly opposes orthodox Christian doctrine, as when it rejects the Holy Spirit overshadowing Mary in the virgin birth, and in doing so seems to presuppose that the Holy Spirit is a female: "Some said: 'Mary conceived by the holy spirit.' They are in error; they do not know what they are saying. When did a woman ever conceive by a woman?" (55.23–26).[35] We find a Gnostic cosmology that rejects the goodness of matter and sees the material world as inherently evil, along with its creator: "The world came about through a mistake. For he who created it wanted to create it imperishable and immortal. He fell short of attaining his desire. For the world never was imperishable, nor, for that matter, was he who made the world" (75.2–9). A theme that is particularly Gnostic in origin is its discussion of the bridal chamber. Mankind's fall takes place in the separation of Adam from Eve, and Christ comes to unite them again into a sort of single unit through the bridal chamber:

> If the woman had not separated from the man, she should not die with the man. His separation became the beginning of death. Because of this Christ came to repair the separation which was from the beginning and again unite the two, and to give life to those who died as a result of separation and unite them. But the woman is united to her husband in the bridal chamber. Indeed those who have united in the bridal chamber will no longer be separated. Thus Eve separated from Adam because it was not in the bridal chamber that she united with him (70.9–23).

The text of the Gospel of Philip is again esoteric and can be difficult to follow. It is also quite late, likely dating to sometime in the third century. We do not know which group in particular used this apocryphal Gospel, but it is very definitely Gnostic in origin and was not used outside of these Gnostic circles.

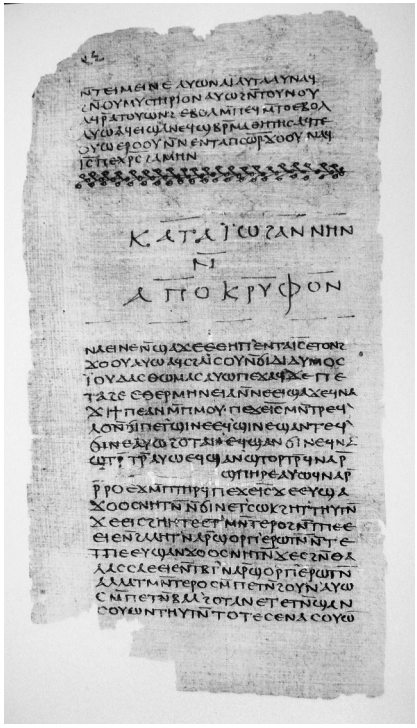


Figure 11.1. The 4th-century manuscript NHC II, discovered at Nag Hammadi. Here is shown the end of the Apocryphon of John and the beginning of the Gospel of Thomas.

The Infancy Gospel of Thomas

The Infancy Gospel is not a Gnostic work and does not promote a specific Christology, but it seeks to supplement what is found in the canonical Gospels concerning the childhood of Jesus in a rather fantastic manner. It dates to before the year 180, for Irenaeus quotes from it, numbering it amongst the "apocryphal and spurious writings."[36] It is relatively short and narrates various events from Jesus's childhood, portraying the young Jesus as something of a terror. For instance, we have an incident where Jesus struck a child dead out of annoyance:

> After this he again went through the village, and a child ran and knocked against his shoulder. Jesus was angered and said to him, 'You shall not go further on your way', and immediately he fell down and died. But some, who saw what took place, said, 'From where was this child born, since his every word is an accomplished deed?' And the parents of the dead child came to Joseph and blamed him and said, 'Since you have such a child, you cannot dwell with us in the

> village; teach him to bless and not to curse. For he is killing our children.' (4.1–2).[37]

Perhaps of a side interest in this text is that it seems to have influenced the Qur'an. In 2.1–3 of the Infancy Gospel, Jesus is shown to be making birds out of clay; a similar account is reflected in Qur'an 5:110.[38] The text is late and has no historical basis, never being given any credence in orthodox circles.

The Apocryphon of John

I have alluded to this book in my brief overview of Gnostic cosmology. It is a work associated with the Sethian Gnostic sect and is another heretical text addressed directly by Irenaeus in his work *Against Heresies*, placing its date before the year 180. It is supposedly a secret book of a secret teaching of Jesus given to John the apostle which presents a detailed Gnostic cosmology. It is quite antagonistic in its view of God in the Old Testament. The text attributes the words of God found in Isaiah 45:5 to the lower being of Yaltabaoth:

> Now the archon who is weak has three names. The first name is Yaltabaoth, the second is Saklas, and the third is Samael. And he is impious in his arrogance which is in him. For he said, 'I am God and there is no other God beside me,' for he is ignorant of his strength, the place from which he had come (11.15–21).[39]

Having described the creation, the work sets itself up in direct opposition to monotheism and despises God as he presents himself in the Old Testament:

> And having created [...] everything, he organized according to the model of the first aeons which had come into being, so that he might create them like the indestructible ones. Not because he had seen the indestructible ones, but the power in him, which he had taken from his mother, produced in him the likeness of the cosmos. And when he saw the creation which surrounds him, and the multitude of the angels around him which had come forth from him, he said to them, 'I am a jealous God, and there is no other God beside me.' But by announcing this he indicated to the angels who attended him that there exists another God. For if there were no other one, of whom would he be jealous? (12.34–13.13)

While other books are antagonistic to the orthodox faith, this one is perhaps the most opposed to the beliefs of the orthodox. It is irreconcilable with Christian belief in one God, and completely at odds with Christian usage of the Old Testament.

The Gospel of Peter

Unlike most of the other apocryphal Gospels we have looked at, this one is actually a narrative Gospel. The text as it survives is fragmentary; what survives is a narrative of the trial, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. It is notable for exonerating Pilate of wrongdoing and for emphasizing the guilt of the Jews. It dates to sometime in the second century. Its extant text is largely unobjectionable, being a retelling of the accounts of the canonical gospels with some embellishments. One of the most noteworthy embellishments is its description of a massive resurrected Jesus and of a talking cross:

> And while they were narrating what they had seen, they saw three men come out from the sepulchre, two of them supporting the other and a cross following them and the heads of the two reaching to heaven, but that of him who was being led reached beyond the heavens. And they heard a voice out of the heavens crying, 'Have you preached to those who sleep?', and from the cross there was heard the answer, 'Yes.' (10.39–42).[40]

Of all of the apocryphal gospels we are looking at, this is the only one we know of being used by any orthodox churches. It was apparently used by the church at Rhossus for a time around the year 200, and this was initially approved by Serapion bishop of Antioch because he had assumed that the church at Rhossus held fast to orthodoxy. Once he became aware of the contents of the Gospel, however, Serapion wrote to Rhossus to condemn the usage of the Gospel of Peter. He wrote, "For we, brethren, receive both Peter and the other apostles as Christ; but we reject intelligently the writings falsely ascribed to them, knowing that such were not handed down to us."[41] Within this Gospel he found traces of Docetism—the belief that Jesus was not fully human but only appeared to be so. From the text that survives, the docetic tendencies probably come from the statement that, while being crucified, Jesus "was silent as having no pain" (10) and the account of Jesus crying out from the cross: "the Lord screamed out, saying: 'My power, O power, you have forsaken me.' And having said this, he was taken up" (19). If Jesus felt no pain and did not truly die, this would be an understanding that Jesus was not fully human. As we have noted that much of the text is unobjectionable, Serapion appears to have taken the same stance: "we have been able to read it through, and we find many things in accordance with the true doctrine of the Saviour, but some things added to that doctrine, which we have pointed out for you farther on."[42] These additions were enough to mark the book as heretical, and Serapion recognized that this writing was one which had not been handed down to them from the apostles. Other than this account of its use at Rhossus for a short time, we do not see it being used in an authoritative manner. It is noteworthy for being such

an outlier, and the account of its usage shows the sort of canon consciousness that existed in the church, i.e., approving of only those books that derived from the apostles. Eusebius would later list this Gospel amongst the rejected heretical books.[43]

Evaluation

There are various other writings that we could speak of that are rejected heretical books. These include the Gospel of Mary, the Gospel of Truth, and the Apocryphon of James, amongst other apocryphal Gospels, apocryphal Acts, and other writings. There would be little reason to give attention to these books as we have done but for the fact of contemporary culture's fascination with them as "lost" books of the Bible. Now here's the thing about these "lost" Gospels and other writings: they were never "contenders" to be included in the canon and the only way in which they were "lost" is they were no longer copied. Thus, the manuscripts were mostly lost to history. We knew of the existence of most of these writings through the church fathers, and the discovery of the Nag Hammadi Library is largely a confirmation of why the writings were rejected in the first place. In Chapter 8 we established the early date of the fourfold Gospel, but it is worth reiterating in the context of these "lost" Gospels once more. Irenaeus had argued, "It is not possible that the Gospels can be either more or fewer in number than they are,"[44] and he was well aware of these other so-called Gospels. Origen also investigated these other Gospels and wrote,

> The Church has four Gospels. Heretics have very many. One of them is entitled *According to the Egyptians*, another *According to the Twelve Apostles*. Basilides, too, dared to write a gospel and give it his own name. 'Many have tried' to write, but only four Gospels have been approved. Our doctrines about the Person of our Lord and Savior should be drawn from these approved Gospels. I know one gospel called *According to Thomas*, and another *According to Matthias*. We have read many others, too, lest we appear ignorant of anything, because of those people who think they know something if they have examined these gospels. But in all these questions we approve of nothing but what the Church approves of, namely only four canonical Gospels.[45]

Eusebius was quite aware of these books as well. We have cited his canon list at length, but we have not yet come to the end of his accounting of it. We finish here with his statements about the heretical books:

> But we have nevertheless felt compelled to give a catalogue of these also, distinguishing those works which according to ecclesiastical tradition are true and genuine and commonly accepted, from those others which, although not canonical

> but disputed, are yet at the same time known to most ecclesiastical writers—we have felt compelled to give this catalogue in order that we might be able to know both these works and those that are cited by the heretics under the name of the apostles, including, for instance, such books as the Gospels of Peter, of Thomas, of Matthias, or of any others besides them, and the Acts of Andrew and John and the other apostles, which no one belonging to the succession of ecclesiastical writers has deemed worthy of mention in his writings.
>
> And further, the character of the style is at variance with apostolic usage, and both the thoughts and the purpose of the things that are related in them are so completely out of accord with true orthodoxy that they clearly show themselves to be the fictions of heretics. Wherefore they are not to be placed even among the rejected writings, but are all of them to be cast aside as absurd and impious.[46]

These books were always recognized as heretical and always recognized as incompatible with orthodox belief. The fact of the existence of the core canon of the New Testament, as well as the use of the Old Testament, is why the church could look at these writings and deem them to be heretical and never even considered them as possible "contenders" for inclusion in the canon. The nearest we come to a writing being "considered" is the Gospel of Peter, and that was only used for a short time by the church at Rhossus, and it was shortly thereafter rejected once it became more generally known what this writing was. Why could the church reject it for its docetic tendencies? Because the apostolic teaching, as found in the core canon, taught a fully human and fully divine Jesus; there was no room for a later writing to appear on the scene that presented a Jesus who was not truly human. The existing canonical core set a boundary for what other writings could be used within the churches.

We return to Richard Dawkins once more. Having imbibed the sensationalized view of early Christianity, as well as being quite uninformed about how the canon formed and what actually happened at the Council of Nicaea, he proposes a question that might be characteristic of what some might wonder about these other Gospels:

> Nobody thinks the fantastic miracles in the infancy gospel of Thomas really happened. Jesus didn't turn mud into sparrows, didn't kill the boy who bumped into him or blind the boy's parents, or lengthen the piece of wood in the carpenter's shop. Why, then, do people believe the equally farfetched miracles described in the official, canonical gospels: turning water into wine, walking on water, rising from the dead? Would they have believed the sparrow miracle, or the

> plank-lengthening miracle, if the infancy gospel had made it into the canon? If not, why not? What's so special about the particular four gospels lucky enough to be chosen for the canon by a bunch of bishops and theologians in Nicaea in AD 325? Why the double standard?[47]

So what is special about our four Gospels? Why not these other ones? I hope the content alone of the books we have looked at will answer the question. But when it comes right down to it, why the four canonical Gospels? Because they are the only ones written in the first century, the only ones early enough to contain authentic tradition about Jesus, and the only ones that could have possibly been handed down by apostles and associates of apostles. The other "lost" Gospels are all late and bear no marks of first-century authorship. As Metzger has observed, "In general, these gospels show far less knowledge of Palestinian topography and customs than do the canonical Gospels—which is what one would expect from the circumstances and date of the composition of such books."[48] Not a single one of them is early enough to be an authentic independent tradition about Jesus (with the possible exception of some sayings in Thomas), all of them being from the second century or later. They are late arrivals on the scene and are, for the most part, plainly hostile to and incompatible with the earliest Christian writings, not to mention the Old Testament.

If you remember nothing else about why to prefer the New Testament writings to these "lost" writings, remember this: the New Testament writings are the only ones that date to the first century. Paul's epistles are the earliest Christian writings that exist, and the four canonical Gospels are the only ones that go back to the first century. The "lost" writings do not represent an independent early tradition, but in fact assume the existence of the canonical writings and the beliefs of the orthodox church. As Andreas Köstenberger and Michael Kruger have noted, "the available evidence suggests that heretical groups were regularly parasitic of the proponents of orthodoxy that were already well established and widespread."[49] If the writings were parasitic of orthodoxy and hostile towards it, then they cannot and do not represent a valid alternative form of Christianity.

If you want to know firsthand why these books were rejected, read them for yourself. I have provided some excerpts here to give an idea of what can be found in them, but there is far more that could be said. Being aware of their content blunts any real suggestion that these books could have been serious "contenders" for inclusion in the canon. The contents of the writings speaks for themselves, for they quite clearly arise from something that is foreign to Christianity. On this point, I will give the final word to F. F. Bruce:

> It is sometimes said that the books which made their way into the New Testament canon are those which supported the victorious cause in the second-century conflict with the various gnostic schools of thought. There is no reason why the student of this conflict should shrink from making a value judgment: the gnostic schools lost because they deserved to lose. A comparison of the New Testament writings with the contents of The Nag Hammadi Library should be instructive, once the novelty of the latter is not allowed to weigh in its favor against the familiarity of the former. Diverse as the gnostic schools were from one another, they all tended to ascribe creation and redemption to two separate (not to say opposed) powers—'he travels the fastest who travels alone.' They not only weakened a sense of community with other contemporaries but a sense of continuity with those who went before. True Christianity, like biblical religion in general, looks to one God as Creator and Redeemer, knows nothing of a solitary religion, and encourages among the people of God an appreciation of the heritage received from those who experienced his mighty acts in the past. And the documents which attest this true Christianity can claim, by the normal tests of literary and historical criticism, to be closer in time and perspective to the ministry of Jesus and the witness of his first apostles than the documents of the gnostic schools. Gnosticism was too much bound up with a popular but passing phase of thought to have the survival power of apostolic Christianity.[50]

To this I can only say, "Amen."

Conclusion

In a book about how we got the Bible, why spend so much time on books that are not part of the Bible? Because understanding why we have the Bible in the form we have it in today involves, to some extent, understanding why it is *not* in a different form. This is especially the case when we see references to "lost books of the Bible" flying around, or when it is popularly proposed that the Bible could have looked very different than it does. This is simply not the case. The rejected orthodox books did not have the apostolic credentials of the canonical books, and so were set aside as valuable but not authoritative. As to the heretical books, they never could have possibly been included in the canon of the New Testament as they were universally rejected, and with good reason. They arose from a completely different theological system that was wholly incompatible with the earliest Christian faith. They were not "competing" Scriptures; they were completely contrary and in opposition to the canonical Scriptures. If we were to indulge in "what ifs" about what the Bible could have looked like, the only truly legitimate "what

if" would be to speak of a smaller canon of 22 books—the core canon—not of an expanded canon or of one that had vastly different contents. Even those orthodox writings that were highly valued were never widely regarded as authoritative, even if they were widely used. The books we have in our Bible today we have for good reason, and suggestions that we could have had other books in our Bible simply will not hold up.

Further Reading

Bock, Darrell L. *The Missing Gospels: Unearthing the Truth Behind Alternative Christianities*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2006.

Köstenberger, Andreas J. and Michael J. Kruger. *The Heresy of Orthodoxy: How Contemporary Culture's Fascination with Diversity Has Reshaped Our Understanding of Early Christianity*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010.

Part 3: The Transmission of Scripture

12.
Transmission and Textual Criticism

Having established the authorship and canon of Scripture, we turn now to the transmission of Scripture. What we mean by this is the process by which the words of the Bible were copied and handed down through the centuries, such that we still have access to them in order to translate them into English today. Of all of the topics covered in this book, this is probably the most technical, which is why we will take an entire chapter to introduce the topic generally before looking at the transmission of the Old and New Testaments in particular.

Manuscripts and Textual Variation

It probably goes without saying—but I am going to say it anyways—that prior to the invention of the printing press, all written works were copied by hand. This fact is captured in the very word we use to refer to ancient written documents, *manuscript*, which derives from the Latin *manu* (by hand) and *scriptus* (written). Every single ancient writing in existence was once manually copied by hand many times over and passed down through the centuries; those that were copied for long enough survived to become the printed texts we have in the modern era. But the line of copying is not quite so straight from author to copyists to printed text; the history of the copying process very much impacts the form of the text that we know in printed editions. The reason for this is that, inevitably, changes would be introduced into the text through the normal copying process, largely due to copyist errors and other scribal activity.

Since all ancient texts were copied by hand, and the Bible is a collection of ancient texts, the Bible was also copied by hand for many centuries. This means that for that vast majority of the textual history of the Bible, there was always an element of human fallibility involved in its copying and preservation. This fallibility, even in the most meticulous of scribes, means that errors were made and textual variation arose to one degree or another. Differences appeared in biblical manuscripts through the normal copying process prior to the time of the printing press (and even after that!). For an ancient manuscript to contain errors is not unusual or scandalous, but it is simply the norm. Now let me say something that may sound troubling: no two biblical manuscripts are exactly alike; every single one differs from all the rest in some way. Without any context, that may seem to imply that the text is a hopeless muddle and we have no confidence in ever knowing what it truly said, but this is not the case. It just means that there are different units of variation. I can say with almost absolute certainty that if multiple people tried to copy the entirety of this chapter by hand (or maybe even by typing!), not one of the copies would match exactly. Would this therefore mean that you could not tell what this chapter originally said based upon the multiple copies? Of course not, for they would all plainly be the same text, though with different variants. This is, however, something of an oversimplification; the type of variation that occurs over hundreds of years of copying is greater than what could happen from a few people making a copy very close to the same time period and copying from the same exemplar, but the basic principle still applies. Though all manuscripts differ, they are identifiably preserving the same basic text. We are not left wondering something the scope of, for example, whether Genesis 1:1 read "in the beginning" or "in the end" or whether Paul said we are justified by faith or justified by our own righteousness. Yes, variations exist between all manuscripts, and yes, some can be quite significant, and yes, in some places we do not have absolute certainty as to how the text should read, but this does not therefore imply that we cannot tell what the text is. What we can say is that there is macro-level stability within the text (big picture), while there are micro-level variations (fine details).[1]

The technical term we use to speak of a difference between manuscripts is a *textual variant*. A textual variant can be any type of difference that exists between manuscripts, whether it be a spelling difference, word order difference, missing word(s), added word(s), or a combination of these. Variants come in various forms; just imagine all the ways you could make an error when copying a text. For our purposes here, we will lump them under two basic headings: unintentional and intentional variants. Unintentional variants are quite easy to understand; who hasn't accidentally copied something wrong in one form or another? Intentional variants sound like they are malicious in intent (who would want to intentionally

change the Word of God?), but they are nowhere near as insidious as all that. To help understand how these variants could occur, we will briefly give some examples of unintentional and intentional variants.

Unintentional Variants

There are various types of errors that could very easily occur when copying a text by hand. You could skip a letter, a word, or a whole sentence. You might be looking at the text but be thinking of something else at the time and accidentally write a word that does not belong. You may have a hard time reading someone's handwriting and just make a mistake because you could not tell what the person had intended to write. Maybe you are tired and your hand is cramped and your attention to detail diminishes. Scholars, known as textual critics, who study these ancient manuscripts have come up with technical terminology to describe the many ways errors could occur:[2]

- *Homophony* – Mistaking of words based on similar sounds, such as the common problem with accidentally exchanging "their," "there," or "they're."
- *Haplography* – The omission of a letter or word.
- *Dittography* – The accidental doubling of a word, such as as writing "as" twice.[3]
- *Metathesis* – Reversal of word or letter order.
- *Fusion* – Linking two words together that should be not linked, e.g., writing "God is nowhere" instead of "God is now here."
- *Fission* – Separating a word into two words, e.g., "Herman" becoming "Her man."
- *Homoioteluton* – Words with similar endings can cause the eye to skip past to the next word or line, such as "Paul saw Samuel and Lemuel" becoming simply "Paul saw Lemuel."
- *Homoioarkton* – Words with similar beginnings can also cause the eye to skip words or lines, as in the names "Pablo, Peter, and Paul" becoming just "Pablo and Paul."

Categorizing these tendencies helps us to understand probable reasons why variants exist. It also helps to understand which letters could be easily mistaken for each other. In Hebrew (and Aramaic), multiple letters look quite similar, such as *resh* and *dalet* (ד ר) or *he, chet* and *tav* (ת ח ה). In Greek, we could point to letters like *omicron* and *theta* (Ο Θ) or *gamma, pi*, and *tau* (Γ Π Τ). A very slight pen stroke is all that separates these letters from each other, and it is not hard to see how some could get mixed up, especially if the handwriting is a bit sloppy. There are times where mistaking one letter for another simply ends in a nonsense reading, and others where it actually creates a perfectly acceptable alternate reading. For

INTHEBEGININGWASTHEWORDANDTHEW
ORDWASWASWITHGODANDTHEWORDWA
SGODHEWASINBEGINNINGWITHGODALLT
HINGSWEREMADETHROUGHIMANDWITH
OUTHIMWASNOTANYTHINGMADETHATW
ASMDEINHIMWASLIFEANDTHELIFEWASTH
ELIGHTOFMENTHELIGHTSHINESINTHEDA
RKNESSHASNOTOVERCOMEIT

Figure 12.1. John 1:1–5 in the ESV written in an English representation of *scriptio continua* (with four errors introduced).

example, there is a late manuscript where the scribe accidentally copied 1 Thessalonians 2:7 as "we were *horses* [*hippoi*] among you." A clear nonsense reading. Yet this same passage has a variant where manuscripts read "we were *children* [*nepioi*]" or "we were *gentle* [*epioi*]."[4] The difference is a single letter and both readings make sense, though one is an error, albeit a minor one.

In the earliest stage of writing the Greek New Testament, the whole text was written in what is known as *scriptio continua*; it was a text that had no spaces whatsoever between words and minimal to no punctuation. Further, it was written in all capital letters (lower case was not yet in use). As you can imagine, this made certain errors easier to make. Try reading John 1:1–5 in *scriptio continua* in Figure 12.1. There are four errors in the text; see if you can spot them and then ask whether those errors affect the meaning of the text in any material way.

When we look at textual variants in both the Old and New Testament, most would be classified as unintentional variants. Human error is a natural part of the copying process, and since biblical manuscripts were copied by imperfect humans, biblical manuscripts have unintentional errors and variants in them. Even in writing this book, I have committed many typing errors that I have had to correct (there may be a few more that I have missed!). If we are prone to commit errors even when typing, then this tendency would be amplified in handwritten texts.

Intentional Variants

As there are numerous ways to create an unintentional textual variant, there are also numerous ways to create an intentional one. The idea of an intentional change may sound nefarious, but this is almost never the case. There are times where scribes apparently thought they were correcting an error, but instead ended up introducing new variants to the text. A good example of this is the tendency of scribes to harmonize between parallel passages, especially in the Synoptic

Gospels. For example, in Matthew 18:11, the phrase "For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost" crept into the manuscript tradition, as Matthew lacked the words but the parallel passage in Luke 19:10 has them. There are times where scribes apparently sought to "improve" the text, as in Mark 1:2. A compound quotation of Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1 is introduced with the phrase "as is written in *Isaiah the prophet*." Some later scribe, recognizing that the quote encompassed two different books, altered the introductory formula to "as is written in *the prophets*." The text was changed by scribes intentionally, but not with a desire to "change" the Word of God, but with the apparent desire to "fix" the text. We can see this same tendency in the Old Testament as well, as there are places where very similar phraseology is used, and the passages are harmonized.[5]

There are also some apparently theologically motivated alterations. Much is often made of this type of variant—probably far too much. We are not mind-readers and cannot speak to motivations; it could be that some scribes wanted to make a passage have a different theological bent, or it could just be that they thought this was an error that needed corrected. An example of this is where we read in Matthew 24:36, "But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only." Most later manuscripts of this passage omit the phrase "nor the Son," which may have been intentionally omitted by some scribes due to the implications of the Son's ignorance.

There are places where the text is altered to make it clearer, such as adding a name in place of a pronoun. Mark's Gospel goes 86 verses—from 6:31–8:26—with only pronouns, not mentioning who is being referred to in the verses. There is a long string of "he," "he," "he," which gets confusing if you lose track of who is being referred to. Later manuscripts clarified by replacing the pronouns several times and inserting the name "Jesus" for clarity; modern translations all follow this practice in this section as well.

Sometimes scribes thought they were fixing the text, and then others would fix it by unfixing it. In Codex Vaticanus, one scribe made a correction to the text in Hebrews 1:3. Several centuries later another scribe came along, saw this correction, erased it, and left a note in the margin that read, "You unlearned wretch! Leave the old reading; don't change it."[6] Scribes were aware of changes that were made, and sometimes reverted them if they thought the original wording was better.

Textual Variation and Meaning

Now that we have discussed the types of variants that can occur in a handwritten text, I would like to give a demonstration of a text that has a fair amount of variation, and then ask if you could say these are the same texts or if the variation

Original	Alteration A	Alteration B
"Logic!" said the Professor half to himself. "Why don't they teach logic at these schools? There are only three possibilities. Either your sister is telling lies, or she is mad, or she is telling the truth. You know she doesn't tell lies and it is obvious that she is not mad. For the moment then and unless any further evidence turns up, we must assume that she is telling the truth."	"Logic!" *he said*, *hlaf* to himself. "Why don't *people* teach *children* logic at these schools? There are only three possibilities. Either *Lucy* is *a liar*, or she is mad, or she is telling the truth. You *all* know she *is not a liar* and it is *plain* that *Lucy* is not mad. For the moment then and unless any further evidence *comes to light*, we must *asume* that she is telling the truth."	"*It is* logic!" *the Professor said, mostly to himself*. "Why *have they stopped teaching* logic at these schools? *It is very puzzling to me.* There *can only be* three possibilities. Either *she* is telling lies, or she is *insane*, or she is *being truthful*. You know she doesn't tell lies and your *sister* is *obviously* not *insane*. *Unless anything* further turns up, we must assume that she is *being truthful*."

Figure 12.2. A paragraph from *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* with textual variation introduced.

makes us lose meaning.[7] Figure 12.2 contains a paragraph from *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* in which I have introduced different types of variants into the text: typos, synonyms, word variation, and added and removed units of words. Even though over a third of the text has textual variation, the macro-level picture is still the same. There is some micro-level variation, but we are not left wondering what the text ultimately said. If you only had the latter two columns, could you arrive at the original text of the first column? Probably not exactly, because there would not be enough to work with. But even if you only had the latter two columns and the first one was lost, is the text so corrupted that we can no longer tell what the first column communicated? Again, this is something of an oversimplification, but it is illustrative nonetheless.

Textual Criticism and Its Precedent

The variation and errors that crept into all ancient texts through the copying process mean that all ancient texts experienced *textual corruption* to one degree or another, thus requiring some restoration to return to a more original form of the text. This is done through the practice known as *textual criticism*. If you are not familiar with the term, it may sound like we are criticizing the text of the Bible in some fashion, but this is not the implication at all. Textual criticism is instead the

practice of restoring texts to their original form as closely as possible. This is done by comparing manuscripts and weighing the variants by various criteria to determine what is most likely to be original. Some of these principles are:

- Determine which reading would be more likely to give rise to the others. The other criteria largely boil down to achieving this goal.
- The more difficult reading is often to be preferred. The idea is that scribes were more likely to make the text easier and more understandable, rather than more difficult.
- The shorter reading is often to be preferred. This is so because scribes had a tendency to clarify and harmonize over time, thus adding more words to the text.
- Weigh internal evidence. Evaluate whether the internal structure of the text makes one reading more probable or if certain mistakes or tendencies are common within a manuscript.
- In evaluating external evidence, readings from the manuscripts must be weighed, not counted. For example, readings in reliable manuscripts, even if only small in number, are given greater weight than readings in a larger number of less reliable manuscripts.

Determining the original reading has some degree of subjectivity that comes with it, but using criteria such as these can help textual scholars come to reasonably good conclusions. In Chapter 15, we will see how some of these criteria apply in evaluating readings.

Textual criticism as a fully elaborated discipline is something of a more modern development, but that does not therefore mean it is new. Whether or not it was known as textual criticism, it was practiced in some form while texts were being copied by hand. We know early Christian writers were aware of textual variants, and we also know that they engaged in practices similar to modern textual criticism in order to decide between the variant readings that they were aware of in the manuscripts of their day.[8] In the history of the church, we know that textual variation was normal because we have early figures who discuss textual differences. Irenaeus was aware of a textual variant that said the number of the Beast was 616 instead of 666.[9] Origen discussed various textual issues, such as knowing of manuscripts of Matthew that referred to Barabbas as *Jesus* Barrabas.[10] He would have been particularly aware of differences between the Hebrew and the four Greek translations of his day in his massive work the Hexapla. Jerome's study led him to be aware of textual variants, as when he recognized that the phrase "without cause" was missing from Matthew 5:22 in most of the oldest copies he knew of.[11] Augustine was aware that the ages of the patriarchs in Genesis were different between the Hebrew manuscripts and the Greek translations.[12] This was the world that they lived in. We should not think of textual variation as

a new or extraordinary phenomenon but as an old and ordinary one. To highlight Irenaeus's example, he evaluated the readings he knew and gave his opinion as to which was best:

> Such, then, being the state of the case, and this number being found in all the most approved and ancient copies [of the Apocalypse], and those men who saw John face to face bearing their testimony [to it]; while reason also leads us to conclude that the number of the name of the beast, [if reckoned] according to the Greek mode of calculation by the [value of] the letters contained in it, will amount to six hundred and sixty and six; that is, the number of tens shall be equal to that of the hundreds, and the number of hundreds equal to that of the units (for that number which [expresses] the digit six being adhered to throughout, indicates the recapitulations of that apostasy, taken in its full extent, which occurred at the beginning, during the intermediate periods, and which shall take place at the end),—I do not know how it is that some have erred following the ordinary mode of speech, and have vitiated the middle number in the name, deducting the amount of fifty from it, so that instead of six decads they will have it that there is but one. [I am inclined to think that this occurred through the fault of the copyists, as is wont to happen, since numbers also are expressed by letters; so that the Greek letter which expresses the number sixty was easily expanded into the letter Iota of the Greeks.][13]

Bruce Metzger highlights how Irenaeus used four principles that are very similar to how we understand textual criticism today:

> (1) the discrimination between manuscripts as 'good and old' or the reverse; (2) the acceptance of one reading and the rejection of another on the evidence of these 'old and good' copies; (3) the confirmation of the same reading by an appeal to internal probability; and (4) an attempt to account for the origin of the corrupted reading.[14]

Metzger goes on to say that, though this passage from Irenaeus is remarkable, "it is by no means unique" amongst other early Christian writings.[15] Because there has always been variation in manuscripts, there has always been a need for evaluating which copy is best. The church fathers needed to engage in textual criticism to access the best form of the text that they could, and we too must do the same today.

Conclusion

Textual variation is one of those subjects that is commonly misunderstood and used as a bludgeon to point to the unreliability of the text of the Bible. What we

need to keep in mind, however, is that textual variation is perfectly normal and to be expected. All ancient documents experience textual variation through the copying process, and all ancient documents need restored to one degree or another to a form as close as possible to the original text. Textual critics study the biblical manuscripts and provide a great service to the church by preserving and restoring the text so that we can have it translated into English. Over the next three chapters, we will look at the transmission of the Old and New Testaments in more detail and seek to determine if we do indeed have the right words in our Bibles.

Further Reading

White, James R. *The King James Only Controversy: Can You Trust Modern Translations?* Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2009.

Wegner, Paul D. *A Student's Guide to Textual Criticism of the Bible: Its History, Methods and Results*. Durham: InterVarsity Press, 2006.

13.
The Transmission of the Old Testament

Have you ever been reading the New Testament and come across a quote from the Old Testament, turned back to the Old Testament to look at its context, and then discovered that there is a difference in the quote between the Old and New Testament? Have you then wondered why that difference exists and why people didn't just fix it so that it read the same? The answer to this question in part lies in the history of the transmission of the Old Testament.

The history of the transmission of the text of the Old Testament is one that is difficult to recount and can appear to be convoluted. The reason for this is that the Old Testament is incredibly ancient, and the earliest stages of its transmission are lost to history. It is complicated by the relative scarcity of Hebrew manuscripts prior to the Middle Ages, meaning that early translations of the Hebrew—known as versions—play a large role in the Old Testament's transmission history. Even the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) are hundreds of years removed from the time of the composition of the books of the Old Testament. Further complicating matters, as we discussed in Chapter 2, editors apparently had a role in shaping the text of the Old Testament into its final form. The implication for us is that we cannot adequately speak of an *original* text of the books of the Old Testament; what original form the text had is an interesting question, but not one that can be adequately answered. Instead of concerning ourselves with the *original* text of the Old Testament, what we will primarily be concerned with in this chapter is what we might call the *canonical* text of the Old Testament. My Christian convictions especially

lead me to prioritize the text that Jesus and the apostles knew and used. This changes the framing of my question for this chapter from *do we have the original words* to *do we have substantially the same words that were known 2000 years ago?* If we have substantially the same words, then we can still be said to have the same books, rather than different books under the same names.

Transmission of the Text in Hebrew

The text of the Old Testament is far older than the text of the New Testament. What this means is that we have access to New Testament manuscripts that are far closer to the time of their composition than we do for the Old Testament. By way of comparison, there are about 180 New Testament manuscripts that can date within 300–400 years of the books' original composition, the earliest manuscript fragment, P52, coming perhaps within 50 years. When it comes to the Old Testament, we basically have no access to its text prior to the year 300 BC, which is already many hundreds of years after the composition of most of the books of the Old Testament. The vast majority of our access to the Hebrew text actually derives from the Middle Ages, with the DSS providing a glimpse into the state of affairs between about 200 BC and 100 AD. This largely eliminates the possibility of reconstructing the *original* text of the Old Testament, which is why the more achievable and relevant aim is in determining what was the *canonical* Hebrew text of the Old Testament.

The Masoretic Text

Our discussion of the transmission of the Old Testament in Hebrew starts in the Middle Ages. Why the Middle Ages? Because this is when the Masoretic Text (MT), the text from which our English Old Testament is primarily translated, was being copied. It was copied from about the sixth to the eleventh century AD by a group of scribes known as the Masoretes, hence the term *Masoretic Text*. Their name derives from the Hebrew term *masorah*, which refers to tradition or what has been handed down; handing down the Scriptures is what the Masoretes did. They were very careful in their scribal practices, being so meticulous that they even counted the letters of the text to ensure the accuracy of their copies. Because of the precision of the Masoretes, the MT is quite uniform, meaning that if we leave aside discoveries at Qumran and other parts of the Judean Desert, "substantive variants among manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible are rare."[1]

In addition to preserving and copying the text, the Masoretes were also innovative in introducing vowels to the consonantal text of the Old Testament. Prior to the time of the Masoretes, most vowels were not written in the text, but were pronounced when read. When we think of a consonantal text, we might think it

בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ

בראשית ברא אלהים את השמים ואת הארץ

Figure 13.1. The text of Genesis 1:1 with and without vowel pointings.

would be hopelessly unreadable, but English is even readable without vowels for native speakers: *y cn stll ndrstnd ths sntnc wtht vwls, evn f t frst y thght y cldn't.* In the same way, Hebrew is readable without vowels, though there could be some occasional ambiguities. Three schools of vocalization arose amongst the Masoretes, reflecting different reading traditions: the Tiberian, the Palestinian, and the Babylonian. Of these three, the Tiberian vocalization system became dominant, specifically that of Aaron ben Asher, and this is what is reflected when we speak of the vowel points of the Masoretic Text.[2] In including vowels in the text, the Masoretes removed ambiguities about how to pronounce various words. This removing of ambiguities reflects a certain level of interpretation, for there are points where there are perfectly viable alternate pronunciations that result in a slightly different meaning of the text. That said, the vowels provided by the Masoretes lend a greater degree of clarity and their usage has become the standard for the Hebrew Old Testament.

In terms of the age of manuscripts representing the MT, they are relatively recent, especially in comparison with the age of the Old Testament. The most substantial manuscripts date from the tenth century or later. The two most important manuscripts representing the Masoretic Text are the Aleppo Codex and the Leningrad Codex. The Aleppo Codex dates to around the year AD 920–930 and was once the earliest complete Hebrew text of the Old Testament that was still in existence. We actually know the scribes responsible for it: it was copied by Shlomo ben Buya'a and the vowel pointings were provided by Aaron ben Moses ben Asher, of the Ben Asher family. It no longer holds the distinction of being the earliest complete Hebrew manuscript of the Old Testament, for substantial portions of it were lost after the anti-Jewish riots in Aleppo in 1947. The manuscript holding the distinction of being the oldest extant complete Hebrew manuscript now belongs to the Leningrad Codex. We can date it rather precisely to around the year 1008 due to its colophon, which tells us that it was copied in Cairo from manuscripts which were copied by Aaron ben Moses ben Asher, and that the scribe who copied the entire text was named Samuel ben Jacob. Printed texts of the Old Testament are based on the Leningrad Codex, and it is the single most influential manuscript in the translation of our Bibles into English.

The MT is a very important textual tradition, but in terms of its material age, it is not all that old. What confidence do we have that it actually reflects the text that Jesus would have known nearly a thousand years before? Well, prior to the mid-twentieth century, we would have had to rely on translations of the Old Testament to access an older period of the text's history (more on that below). All of that changed with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947, giving us access to truly ancient manuscripts of the Hebrew for the very first time in the modern era. Having begun with the MT, we now turn to a chronological recounting of the transmission of the Old Testament, bringing us up to the time of the MT and beyond.

Prior to the Third Century BC

How was the Old Testament copied prior to the third century BC? We have to admit that the copying process prior to then is largely a mystery lost to time. We have no direct evidence to the state of the text and how the copying was carried out. The best we can point to is the Ketef Hinnom amulets, also known as the Silver Scrolls, which are not really biblical manuscripts, but amulets containing a version of the Aaronic Blessing of Numbers 6:23–27. These date to around the year 600 BC and are by far the earliest Hebrew texts of the Old Testament that remain extant. We cannot truly consider these to be biblical manuscripts, but they are a witness to a form of this blessing at an early date. Aside from these, we have no texts dating to before the third century BC.

Though there is little we can say for certain for this time period, we can make some reasonable assumptions about the state of the text. Perhaps the most certain assertion we can make is that the text of the Old Testament was not originally written in the familiar Hebrew square script, but in a script closely related to the Phoenician script, known as *Paleo-Hebrew.* This is the script used on the Ketef Hinnom amulets. It was not until after the exile (587 BC) that the familiar square script was adopted, which was adapted from the Aramaic square script commonly in usage across the Ancient Near East. The text of the Old Testament moved from being written in Paleo-Hebrew to the square script, a change that has affected all subsequent history of the Hebrew text. Since vowels do not appear until the Masoretic Text, this earliest period was also written in a purely consonantal form. Again, we should not think that the text was unreadable; even today, modern Hebrew is still mostly written without vowels, as is Arabic—a close language relative—and they are perfectly intelligible and understood.

In this silent period before the third century BC, the text was stabilizing into the form that we know it today, namely the form that was passed down and



Figure 13.2. Genesis 14:12 – 15:13 from the Leningrad Codex.

reflected in the Masoretic Text. It would be during this time period that the editorial work took place, shaping the text largely into its final form. While the text was stabilizing, it is possible that various versions (or editions if you prefer) of the text existed simultaneously. As Brotzman and Tully suggest, "there is evidence that sometimes a book was created, recognized as authoritative and copied, was subsequently revised, and then that authoritative revision began to be copied. This meant that there might be two versions of the same book which were being copied and circulated at the same time."[3] Books such as Joshua, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel



Figure 13.3. The divine name, YHWH, written in Paleo-Hebrew. As found in in the manuscript 11Q5.

may fall into this category. However this stabilization process occurred, it appears to have been largely complete by the time we come to the third century BC.

The Third Century BC until the Second Century AD

Up until 1947, access to Hebrew texts older than the ninth century was largely non-existent. The only ancient manuscript known in the early twentieth century was the Nash Papyrus, a fragmentary manuscript from around 150–100 BC containing parts of Exodus 20:2–17 and Deuteronomy 5:6–21. This all changed with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS). From the caves around Qumran, about 930 fragmentary manuscript have been discovered, of which about 206 are biblical scrolls, ranging in date from about 250 BC to AD 68.[4] With the exception of the Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa[a]), the scrolls generally contain no more than a tenth of an entire book.[5] Of the biblical scrolls, there are fragments from every book of the Old Testament with the exception of Esther. These derive from a Jewish religious community often referred to as the *Qumran community*. This Qumran community is likely identifiable with the Essenes, a minority Jewish sect which had largely separated itself from mainstream Judaism. They could be thought of as a sort of monastic sect, as they appear to have stressed celibacy and lived an ascetic lifestyle. The significance of these discoveries can hardly be overstated, for they pushed our access to the Hebrew of the Old Testament back by over a thousand years, as well as giving us further insights into the thought of a particular Jewish sect.

The biblical manuscripts amongst the DSS confirmed that the MT is a very ancient text, for they show that the MT "has been more or less frozen since at least the third century BCE."[6] Emanuel Tov also comments, "The origins of [the MT] are unclear, but similar texts must have existed before the stage for which we have manuscript evidence, that is, before the [MT]-like texts from Qumran (c. 250 BCE)."[7] In other words, the text preserved in the MT is very old and predates the material found at Qumran. Before the discovery of the DSS, we could surmise that the MT preserved an ancient version of the Hebrew text based upon translations like the Septuagint (LXX) and the Vulgate, but we had no direct way of

knowing this from ancient Hebrew manuscripts. Tov further sums up the relation between the Leningrad Codex and the manuscripts found in the Judean Desert (including the DSS) to be "one of almost complete identity since the consonantal framework of [the MT] changed very little over the course of one thousand years."[8]

While the DSS confirmed that the MT preserves a very ancient text, they also showed that a degree of textual diversity existed before and during the time of Jesus. This diversity is reflected in what are known as *text types*—slightly different, but definitely distinct versions of the text. A slight majority of manuscripts align with what is known as the *proto-Masoretic Text*—the consonantal text that would eventually have vowels added to it by the Masoretes (we can't truly speak of the *Masoretic* Text until we get to the time of the Masoretes, even if the text is largely the same). There are other texts that are similar to the Samaritan Pentateuch (see below), some that agree with the LXX, and some that do not align with any other known text type.[9] One of the most dramatic examples of the textual diversity that we see is a shorter form of the book of Jeremiah, one that matches with the version we see in the LXX; in the LXX, the text of Jeremiah is about an eighth shorter than the MT. At Qumran, the manuscript 4QJer^{b} shows a Hebrew text that more closely accords with the LXX version.[10] We will discuss the significance of this textual diversity further below.

Perhaps the most famous discovery at Qumran is the Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa^{a}), which dates to the second century BC. What makes this manuscript particularly extraordinary is that nearly the entire scroll of Isaiah has survived down to the present; manuscripts of such an age are usually quite fragmentary. It has sometimes been said that the text of the Isaiah Scroll matches exactly with the text found in the MT, though this is not precisely the case. It does agree quite closely with the proto-Masoretic Text, but there are various points of departure from it. There are hundreds of variants, most of which are simply errors or spelling and grammatical changes, though some are substantive, such as the original hand having a shorter version of Isaiah 40:7, with a later scribe adding in the longer text.[11] Many corrections are found in the text, as at verse 40:7, which often bring it in closer harmony with the proto-Masoretic Text.[12] While 1QIsa^{a} reflects a slightly different text, the lesser-known scroll of Isaiah, 1QIsa^{b}, preserves a text that is nearly identical with the MT.

The finds at Qumran are not the only significant discoveries that date to this time period, but there are also manuscripts discovered at Masada and those found near Wadi Murabba'at, which date to the time of the Bar Kochba revolt around the year AD 135. Now whereas the finds at Qumran displayed some textual diversity, the manuscripts found at these other sites display more textual uniformity,



Figure 13.4. A portion of the Great Isaiah Scroll.

agreeing largely with the proto-Masoretic text type. Tov provides some interesting commentary on these differences in regions:

> Most scholars treat the Masada evidence and that of the Bar-Kochba sites in the same way, and therefore draw the conclusion that the Qumran scrolls display textual plurality, while the "later" texts from the other sites reflect textual uniformity. However, the Masada texts (copied between 50 BCE and 30 CE) are not later than the Qumran texts. The Bar-Kochba sites are later, since the scrolls found there were copied between 20 BCE and 115 CE. The difference between the sites is therefore not chronological, but socio-religious. … As a result, the finds from the Judean Desert do not support an assumption of stabilization or a standard text since both early (Masada) and late texts (the Bar Kochba sites of Wadi Murabba'at, Wadi Sdeir, Nahal Hever, Nahal Arugot, and Nahal Se'elim) reflect [the MT], while Qumran reflects a textual plurality. During the same period, we thus find a stable text tradition at Masada and the other sites ([MT]) and textual fluidity at Qumran ([MT]-like and other texts).[13]

The sites at Qumran are unique in the Hebrew textual tradition for their textual diversity, but they are obviously not absolutely unique for this diversity is reflected

in the translation of the LXX. This textual diversity does not last long after the time of Jesus, however. After the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, these other text types disappear and all we are left with is the proto-Masoretic Text, which then gets handed down and copied until it takes its final form with vowels in the Masoretic Text. Why did the other text types disappear? We cannot truly know why, but the best explanation to me seems to be that this text type was the most common, and the groups who used and copied different text types, such as the Qumran community, simply died out and no longer exerted influence on the Hebrew textual tradition.[14]

The Late Second Century until the Eighth Century

In the Hebrew transmission of the Old Testament, we might consider this the "silent period." Almost nothing survives for manuscripts, leaving us a large gap in the historical record. This is what makes the earlier discoveries so significant, for there really is no Hebrew bridge from the earliest discoveries until the extant manuscripts of the MT. The Hebrew gap is largely filled by translations, such as the LXX or the Latin Vulgate; we will discuss how translations help fill in gaps in the textual history below. What we can say from this time period does not necessarily derive from manuscript evidence, but what we can discern in the bridging of time periods. The proto-Masoretic Text became the only Hebrew text type that was being handed down, as evidenced both from the later manuscripts from the earliest period, as well as from the testimony of later translations. It is about the end of the fifth century or early sixth century when we have the rise of the Masoretes and their handling of the text. Vowel pointings were added and, though we have little material surviving to date, it is a fair assumption that the text from this time period is essentially the same as the surviving Masoretic manuscripts.

The Transition from Manuscripts to Printed Texts

As mentioned above, most of our Hebrew manuscripts derive from the tenth century and later. There is also little more to say about the transmission of the Hebrew from this time period onward, for the Hebrew text essentially fully stabilized with the Masoretic Text. Here we find the major manuscripts preserved. Since we have already discussed the characteristics of the MT above, the most significant development came about with the ability to print Hebrew texts.

The first complete Hebrew text of the Old Testament was printed in 1488 in Soncino, near Milan. The most significant early printed text was the text edited by Jakob ben Chayim in 1524/1525, which came to be known as the Hebrew *textus receptus* (received text). For several hundred years, this printed text was the

standard in Hebrew and was likely used in the translation of the King James Version. Various other editions were printed in the intervening years.[15] Standard for Bible translation in the modern era is the printed text known as *Biblia Hebraica.* The first edition of this printed text was published in 1906 by Rudolf Kittel, and it was based upon the text of Jakob ben Chayyim. The third edition changed its base text to that of the Leningrad Codex, and this practice has continued down to the present. The subsequent revision, completed from 1967–1977, known as *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS), has served as the base text for Bible translations into English. A fifth edition, known as *Biblia Hebraica Quinta* (BHQ), is still in the process of being edited and may be completed within the next ten years.

What is noteworthy about BHS is that, unlike printed texts for the New Testament, its text is not based upon text critical attempts to reconstruct the original or best form of the text but reflects a single manuscript: the Leningrad Codex. Variant readings are noted in the textual apparatus but they do not appear in the main body of the text. What this means is that Bible translators do not translate BHS exactly but engage in textual criticism and incorporate other readings into the translation where there is better evidence than what is preserved in the body of BHS.

Summary

The history of the transmission of the Old Testament in Hebrew is one that, in one regard, is relatively straightforward. While the MT is quite young in terms of material age, it faithfully preserves a very ancient text, as is shown by the DSS and other finds in the Judean Desert. Yet the MT is not absolutely perfectly preserved; despite the incredible care of the Masoretes, they inherited a text that already had some corruption that had crept in, such as the age of Jehoiachin being eight years old in 2 Chronicles 36:9 and eighteen in 2 Kings 24:8 (it is in fact a testimony to the faithfulness of the Masoretes that they did not harmonize and correct this). This corruption is reflected in the printed texts that are used in the translation of the Bible since they are based upon the later MT. Furthermore, the DSS show that some textual diversity once existed amongst the Hebrew manuscripts. To help fill out the history of the transmission of the Old Testament, we turn now to the versions.

Major Versions

The MT may reflect a very ancient Hebrew text, but its material witness is relatively recent and it does not always preserve the best reading. There are areas where errors have crept into the transmission process and there are not enough extant Hebrew manuscripts to always adequately evaluate readings. This is where

the versions come in. The versions reflect a Hebrew text at a specific point in time, and thus they bear witness to an underlying Hebrew text that gets us back to an earlier period in the history of the transmission.

The Septuagint

As the earliest translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint (LXX) is the most significant of all the versions. The text was translated into Greek between about 300 BC – 100 BC, making it a witness to an early form of the Hebrew, oftentimes even older than that of the DSS.[16] Materially, the surviving manuscripts are far older than the MT. The oldest fragments date back to about the second or first century BC, while we have nearly the entire Old Testament preserved in the fourth-century Codex Vaticanus.[17] The translation was done in stages, with the Pentateuch likely being the first translated into Greek, and the others following throughout the succeeding decades. The effect of this is that there are various translation approaches reflected in the LXX and they differ from book to book.[18] The Pentateuch, for example is moderately literal in its translation, books like Jeremiah can be classified as extremely literal, while other books such as Job and Proverbs could be considered to be quite free translations bordering on paraphrase (see Chapter 16 for further discussion of translation methodology).[19] Because of the nature of translation, as well as the various revisions that occurred during the years, it is difficult to speak of *the* Septuagint as if it is a monolithic text. But it is a good catchall phrase that describes a definite textual tradition, even if it is not precise.[20]

While the LXX is a witness to the MT at many points, it also differs in quite significant ways from the Hebrew we find in the MT: Jeremiah is about an eighth shorter and chapters after 25 are rearranged; Ezekiel is about five percent shorter and also reflects rearrangements; Job is in total a sixth shorter, though it also has some substantial additions, such as a much longer statement from Job's wife in 2:9.[21] At times, these differences are apparently because the LXX was translated from a different version of the Hebrew than the MT; the DSS provide confirmation that this is the case in books like Jeremiah. Many times, however, we must take into account the nature of the translation style: Job more likely reflects the liberties the translator took in bringing the text into Greek.

Because the LXX often reflects an early form of the underlying Hebrew, there are times when it preserves a better reading than does the MT. This is especially true when it agrees with the DSS or another version (though other versions have been influenced by the LXX). A place where the LXX likely preserves the original reading that was lost in the MT is at Psalm 145:13, an acrostic Psalm that was missing the line beginning with the letter *nun*. The LXX contains the phrase,

"The Lord is faithful in all his words and kind in all his works," and one DSS manuscript (11QPs[a]) provides Hebrew agreement, confirming that Hebrew was indeed behind the Greek translation.[22] When you read your Bible, you will find footnotes peppered throughout where the translators preferred a reading found in the LXX over one found in the MT. In terms of overall importance, the LXX likely rivals the DSS in its importance as a witness to the text of the Old Testament.

Other Greek Versions

The widespread adoption of the LXX by Christians appears to have led Greek-speaking Jews to set the LXX aside and to use other Greek translations of the Old Testament. These other versions are remembered by the names of their translators: that of Aquila, that of Symmachus, and that of Theodotion. Each translation was likely completed during the second century AD, and all of these translations are largely in agreement with the MT, though with varying translation methodologies. Aquila's translation is very literal, which makes for some awkward Greek but makes it useful for discerning what the underlying Hebrew was. Theodotion's translation falls more on the literal side, but not extremely so. That of Symmachus follows a freer translation methodology. Each one in their own way is a witness to the Hebrew, though of an underlying Hebrew somewhat later than that of the LXX. Since other textual streams in Hebrew seem to have been lost and died out after the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, it is not surprising that these should be in more agreement with the MT.

Unfortunately, these versions have almost entirely been lost to history. What we do have has come down to us in fragments of Origen's Hexapla. In his Hexapla, Origen arranged six columns: (1) Hebrew, (2) a transliteration of the Hebrew into Greek, (3) Aquila, (4) Symmachus, (5) the LXX, and (6) Theodotion. Origen had scholarly intentions with his work, but it also seems he had apologetic motivations as well, for in his debates with the Jews, he did not want to quote what was not found in the copies of Scripture that they used.[23] The Hexapla would have been such a massive work it probably only ever existed in full in its original form, and was itself also lost after the Muslim expansion in the seventh century. We do have portions of it preserved in later manuscripts, giving us access to these other Greek translations.

The Samaritan Pentateuch

While technically not a version, as it is not a translation, I address the Samaritan Pentateuch (SP) here because it falls outside of the mainstream of the Hebrew textual tradition. Sometime prior to the first century BC, the Jews and Samaritans separated from each other, with the Samaritans forming their own peculiar sect.

The Samaritans apparently only accepted the Pentateuch as authoritative, and so we have a distinctive Hebrew edition of the Pentateuch separate from the mainstream Hebrew transmission. The existence of the SP only became known in the West during the seventeenth century and its material age is relatively recent; of the 150 extant manuscripts of the SP, the oldest date to the ninth century AD, while most are from the fifteenth.

Due to the sectarian nature of the SP, it contains some distinctive and peculiar readings, such as containing a change to Deuteronomy 27:4 where the altar is to be built on Mount Gerizim instead of Mount Ebal, as well as adding a command to the Ten Commandments to build the altar on Mount Gerizim. This difference in places of worship illuminates Jesus's discussion with the Samaritan woman in John 4:20 and her statement, "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." In addition to some of its sectarian readings, it is also peculiar for continuing to be written in the Paleo-Hebrew script, as the Samaritans never seem to have adopted the square script as the Jews did.

The SP was little valued until the discovery of the DSS, which showed a text type that was similar to what was found in the later manuscripts of the SP. Scholars then re-evaluated its usefulness in light of these new discoveries. Though there are definite sectarian alterations to the text, these are few in number and are later additions, not being present in the parallels in the DSS. Overall, the SP has about 6,000 places of disagreement with the MT, though in about 1,900 of those points it agrees with the LXX against the MT.[24] The agreement with the LXX further confirms the ancient nature of the text. Interestingly, the nature of the differences with the MT often points to the even more ancient nature of the MT, since the SP and its counterparts in the DSS show a tendency to update the text. As Peter Gentry says, "a comparison between the Samaritan Pentateuch and the later MT shows that many differences between the two represent a modernizing of the former in terms of grammar and spelling."[25] The independent nature of the SP as a separate Hebrew stream, as well as its agreement with the DSS and the LXX makes the SP a useful tool in confirming and correcting the text of the MT.

Aramaic Targums

The word *targum* simply means "translation," though the Aramaic Targums are a bit more than that. They are what we may call interpretive translations in that they freely paraphrase and add commentary right alongside the translation. The need for the Targums arose after the Jewish exile to Babylon, for the Jewish people increasingly used Aramaic as their everyday language, while Hebrew became more of a liturgical language. Since the people were becoming less famil-

iar with Hebrew, the Scriptures needed to be translated for them. Initially, this was done orally, and this practice may be traced back as far as Ezra's day, for it is possible that this is what was occurring in Nehemiah 8:7–8 when the Levites were helping the people to understand the reading of the Law. Eventually, the tradition of the oral translation came to be solidified in the written Aramaic Targums, which are dated to about the fifth century AD. A couple of Targums have been discovered amongst the DSS, meaning the written tradition may be earlier than was previously thought.[26]

There are multiple Targum versions, with some being literal translations of the Hebrew, and others being very free, paraphrastic, and interpretive. The generally free nature of the Targums means they are not true or pure translations; they are generally more reflective of Jewish interpretive practices than of the text of the Old Testament itself. Yet because Aramaic is a language very closely related to Hebrew, they can prove to be valuable witness to the underlying Hebrew at points—provided the commentary and text can be disentangled. Where the translation and commentary can be properly separated from each other, it appears that the Targums closely follow the MT.[27]

The Syriac Peshitta

Another closely related translation tradition is the Syriac Peshitta, a title which means "simple." Syriac is a dialect of Aramaic; thus it is also very similar to Hebrew and can preserve good correspondence with it. The Old Testament of the Peshitta was possibly completed by the end of the third century AD and it appears to have been translated from a text similar to the proto-MT. As with the LXX, its translation appears to have been carried out by multiple individuals, and so its translation style varies from book to book, from more literal to more free. It also bears marks of influence from the LXX. On the whole, its value is more in confirming the MT rather than correcting it, for its date means it was translated during a time when the Hebrew was largely becoming standardized and alternate streams no longer existed.[28]

Latin Versions

The earliest Latin translation of the Old Testament is known as the Old Latin. It is not a translation of the Hebrew but is rather a translation of the Greek of the LXX, making it a translation two steps removed from the Hebrew and more of a witness to the LXX than anything else. Of greater value is the late fourth-/early fifth-century translation of Jerome, commonly known as the Vulgate. Jerome's study of Hebrew meant that he was capable of providing a translation from the Hebrew text, rather than from the LXX. While controversial at first, his transla-

tion came to be the undisputed and dominant text of the Western Church until the time of the Reformation.

Though the Vulgate is the translation of Jerome, he appears to have varied his translation style to some extent throughout the books. Complicating matters somewhat is his tendency to sometimes translate the text based on his Christian understanding, as well as simply leaving some Old Latin translations due to respect for church tradition, meaning there is some cross-contamination with the LXX.[29] The late date of Jerome's translation means it largely agrees with the MT, though its earlier material evidence gives evidence of an earlier stage of the text than do the extant MT manuscripts.

Using the Versions

The primary place of the versions is to confirm the reliability of the Hebrew text. Since the manuscripts of the Masoretic Text are so late and the DSS are not comprehensive, the versions cumulatively provide a witness to the overall stability of the text. At other points, they are invaluable in reconstructing the text in places where corruption has seeped into the Masoretic tradition. Read through the footnotes in your Bible translation and you will find references to these versions and discover just how much of a role they play in correcting the Hebrew.

We should also note, however, that using the versions comes with certain difficulties. The most daunting difficulty is that before a version can be used to correct the Hebrew, textual criticism must be done on the version first. As with every handwritten text, these versions also experienced textual corruption over time, and so a later textual variant could not be a witness to what was originally translated. Other difficulties involve the nature of translation and determining whether differences are the result of a different underlying Hebrew exemplar or if they are the result of the translation process. This is especially problematic in those portions that are much more freely translated. Because versions subsequent to the LXX were all impacted by it, there is also the question of whether agreement reflects dependence or if there is an independent witness. Though these difficulties exist, they each may be fruitfully used as witnesses in their own ways.

Textual Diversity: The LXX and the New Testament

Our English translations of the Bible primarily rely upon the MT. But when we come to the New Testament, we find this is often not the case. Very often, when the New Testament authors quote the Old Testament, they are quoting from the LXX instead of translating the Hebrew. Have you ever come across a New Testament quotation from the Old Testament, flipped back to the Old Testament, and found it was different? Have you ever wondered why this was? Much of the

time, it is because of the nature of the LXX. Sometimes, these differences are just due to how a passage was translated. A perfect example of this is found in how Mark 1:3 quotes Isaiah 40:3; the text comes across slightly differently, and this is because Mark quotes from the LXX:

> "A voice of one calling in the wilderness,'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for Him.'" (Mark 1:3)
>
> A voice of one calling: "Prepare the way for the LORD in the wilderness; make a straight highway for our God in the desert. (Isa. 4:30)

There is almost certainly no difference in the underlying Hebrew that was translated into the LXX, but the translator made translational adjustments to it. Most of the time, when the New Testament writers quote from the LXX, it agrees with the Hebrew of the MT. Yet not every time; there are places where they quote the LXX in ways that disagree with the MT.[30] When Stephen refers to 75 people who went down to Egypt with Jacob, he is citing the number found in the LXX; the MT says the total was 70 (compare Acts 7:14 and Gen. 46:27). When Luke 4:18 quotes Jesus's reading of Isaiah 61:1, it includes the phrase "recovering of sight to the blind," a phrase that is lacking in the Hebrew but is found in the LXX. When Paul quotes from Isaiah 11:10, he cites the LXX nearly verbatim, only leaving out the final clause:[31]

> And again Isaiah says, "The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope (Rom. 15:12, ESV).
>
> In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious (Isa. 11:10, ESV).
>
> And in that day the root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope, and his rest shall be honorable (Isa. 11:10, LXX).

Textual diversity existed during the time of Jesus and the apostles, and it is something that is attested to within the pages of the New Testament. The discovery of the DSS has made it clear that not all of these differences can simply be chalked up to translational choices found in the LXX, but some reflect a slightly different Hebrew form that once existed. If the idea of textual diversity is troubling, I would point out that the apostles made use of both the Hebrew and the LXX and were surely not ignorant of where differences existed, and yet they used the LXX even where it differed from the Hebrew. If they could live in a world where slightly different texts coexisted, then we should be able to as well. And in fact, we do live in such a world; our world of many different English translations is a good parallel for how to think about the textual diversity that once existed in manuscripts of the

Old Testament. Pick up an NLT and KJV and read through a few chapters. Do they read anything alike? Hardly at all. But are they communicating the same basic message? Yes. There may be some differences in the details, but we do not have a wholesale reordering of our understanding of God because of these differences. So it is with the text of the Old Testament.

Conclusion

The story of the transmission of the Old Testament takes twists and turns through changes in Hebrew script, ancient versions, dramatic discoveries, and developments lost to history. While we prioritize the text of the Old Testament in Hebrew, understanding how we have come to have the Old Testament today cannot be restricted to the Hebrew alone. In one regard, the very stable text of the Hebrew makes the story quite straightforward. The discovery of the DSS confirms the ancient nature of the MT and its reliable transmission, but the discovery also points to a slightly more complicated history of the Hebrew than only the MT would appear to display. Some textual diversity was a reality during the days of Jesus and the apostles, and our New Testaments bear witness to this in its usage of the LXX. Is the Hebrew always perfect? No, but it was very well preserved through the centuries, such that we can say it is substantially the text that Jesus and the apostles would have known. And where the MT is deficient, we have the versions to help us out.

Further Reading

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14.
The Transmission of the New Testament

In the age of the printed book, we expect every book we read to be a perfect photocopy of another copy of the same book. We perhaps expect this even more so of the Bible since we build our very faith upon its teachings. The idea of differences in biblical manuscripts might, at first, seem alarming and call into question whether we can really consider the Bible to be trustworthy and authoritative. This is precisely the path that Bart Ehrman took when he learned of the differences between New Testament manuscripts: it contributed to him rejecting the Bible as authoritative. To hear Ehrman describe the state of affairs, you would be forgiven for concluding that the text of the New Testament is a hopeless mess:

> It is one thing to say that the originals were inspired, but the reality is that we don't have the originals—so saying they were inspired doesn't help me much, unless I can reconstruct the originals. Moreover, the vast majority of Christians for the entire history of the church have not had access to the originals, making their inspiration something of a moot point. Not only do we not have the originals, we don't have the first copies of the originals. We don't even have copies of the copies of the originals, or copies of the copies of the copies of the originals. What we have are copies made later—much later. In most instances, they are copies made many centuries later. And these copies all differ from one another, in many thousands of places. … Possibly it is easiest to put it in comparative terms: there are more

> differences among our manuscripts than there are words in the New Testament.[1]

Ehrman is hardly the only one to suggest that differences in manuscripts undermine the authority of Scripture. Some adherents to the King James Only movement argue in a very similar manner, contending that unless we have the words absolutely perfectly preserved, then we do not have the Word of God.[2] Add on top of these voices the memes and images that fly around the internet, and the average Christian may be left wondering what is true or may simply want to bury their head in the sand. My aim in this chapter is to provide a contextualized overview of the transmission of the New Testament, and in so doing, show where the sensationalism simply does not hold up to scrutiny and that the New Testament has been sufficiently preserved and transmitted down to the present day.

Scribes and Copying the New Testament

When the books of the New Testament were written, they did not remain in a single copy for long. Churches very quickly shared these writings with other churches, and the writings spread across the Mediterranean world as copies and then more copies were made. As such, the earliest Christian scribes form the first link in the chain in the transmission of the New Testament. Without them, we would have no New Testament in existence, and if they copied it very poorly, we would not be sure if we even had the same books. We can deduce from our earliest manuscripts that the Christian scribes who produced them were largely not "professional" scribes. Recognizing this, certain scholars have painted them as somewhat incompetent scribes who fundamentally compromised the integrity of the text from an early date. Ehrman writes, "Because they were not highly trained to perform this kind of work, they were more prone to make mistakes than professional scribes would have been."[3] The implication that Ehrman especially likes to draw from this is that we do not know how many mistakes and alterations were introduced into the text before our earliest extant manuscripts. The judgment that the earliest Christian scribes were not "professionals" derives primarily from their handwriting. In general, their script was not as adorned and polished as might be expected from a "professional" scribe. But poor handwriting does not imply that the quality of the copy is compromised; one can copy words in an unattractive way but still present a faithful copy. Early Christian manuscripts were often written in a manner that is termed *documentary hand*, that is, a type of handwriting you might use for everyday business, which is not adorned and is not as neat as you might expect to see from a professionally produced literary work. The *way* someone writes when they copy a manuscript is not indicative of the *quality* of the copy that they produce. Recent research has shown that "most of the early Christian

manuscripts are clearly the products of trained and competent copyists, not zealous amateurs."[4] As Zachary Cole summarizes,

> As a group, early New Testament manuscripts show the same levels of care, experience, and accuracy that one could reasonably expect of any ancient text. While it remains true that, in many ways, Christian papyri resemble documentary papyri (as they use the codex book form and abbreviations), it is important to stress that this does not equate to "unprofessional" work in the sense of untrained or inexperienced. As a group, early New Testament manuscripts show the same levels of care, experience, and accuracy that one could reasonably expect of any ancient text. So, to describe the earliest Christian copyists as "nonprofessionals" is misleading because it conjures an impression of the evidence that is warped by modern ideas. While it may well be true that they were not necessarily scribes by trade or by title (although some probably were), it is quite clear that they were nonetheless capable of high-quality work.[5]

That the scribes were not haphazardly copying texts is demonstrated also in the scribal culture that arose in early Christianity, which we have already addressed in Chapter 7 for its implications for the canon. From the earliest extant manuscripts, we see a decided Christian preference for the codex in the face of the general Greco-Roman preference for the book roll. They also developed the very particular practice of abbreviating certain sacred names known as the *nomina sacra*.[6] While not absolutely uniform, this degree of consistency amongst Christian copyists speaks to the copying process being controlled to some extent even in the earliest period. Some Christian centers apparently had quite an efficient means of quickly making copies and sending them off to other churches. A noteworthy example of this is found in Polycarp of Smyrna's *Epistle to the Philippians*, where he writes, "We are sending to you the letters of Ignatius that were sent to us by him together with any others that we have in our possession, just as you requested."[7] The chain of dissemination is also visible in the Martyrdom of Polycarp, for it was first a letter sent from Smyrna to the church at Philomelium, and it closed with instructions to pass the letter on to "the brothers and sisters who are farther away."[8] A chain of copyists is also included in the manuscript tradition, with three different individuals—Gaius, Socrates, and Pionius—who identify themselves as having copied the previous person's copy.[9] As Gamble sums it up, "This intense activity shows that the church at Smyrna in particular had both the interest and capacity to reproduce and distribute texts, and this, moreover, during the first two decades of the second century, a period often regarded as still heavily committed to oral tradition and little interested in the written word."[10]

The majority of the earliest manuscripts still in existence were written on papyrus, a material made from the papyrus plant that grows along the Nile River. It was made into a writing material through a process by which it was cut into strips, pressed and beaten, dried, and then smoothed until it became suitable for writing. Because of the way the strips were laid, one side was better for writing on than the other. Papyrus was not a very durable material and would eventually disintegrate under normal conditions; the earliest papyrus manuscripts have all been found in Egypt and have only survived due to the very dry climate. Later manuscripts were written on a material known as parchment, which was made from animal skins that were stretched very thin, scraped, and made suitable for writing. A similar material is called vellum, which is finer in quality and made from young animals. Parchment and vellum were much more durable and proved to be a better material for writing on both sides. It was not until the late Middle Ages that paper came to be more commonly used.[11]

We do not often think of the production of texts as the result of great physical labor, but that is exactly what it was to copy manuscripts of the Bible. A common statement of scribes in the Middle Ages was, "He who does not know how to write supposes it to be no labor; but though only three fingers write, the whole body labors." In the words of another, "Writing bows one's back, thrusts the ribs into one's stomach, and fosters a general debility of the body." We even find some marginal notes with complaints that scribes made during the copying process. One wrote, "What a burden to be accenting and scribbling… even though I am ailing from this most terrible asthma." In all of their toil, we should remember that the scribes loved the Lord and the Scripture they were copying. They were well aware of their human weaknesses but prayed that their work would be fruitful. In a Coptic-Arabic manuscript, we find the following prayer:

> O reader, in spiritual love forgive me, and pardon the daring of him who wrote, and turn his errors into some mystic good. … There is no scribe who will not pass away, but what his hands have written will remain for ever. Write nothing with your hand but that which you will be pleased to see at the resurrection. … May the Lord Jesus Christ cause this holy copy to avail for the saving of the soul of the wretched man who wrote it.[12]

In addition to the large amount of labor involved, there was also a heavy cost. For a complete Bible like the fourth-century Codex Sinaiticus, which included both the Old and New Testament (and Apocrypha), it is estimated that the skins of about 360 animals would have been required,[13] while the overall cost would have been about 30,000 denarii; for comparison, a century previous, the yearly stipend for a legionary was 750 denarii.[14] In short, it would take a small fortune to produce

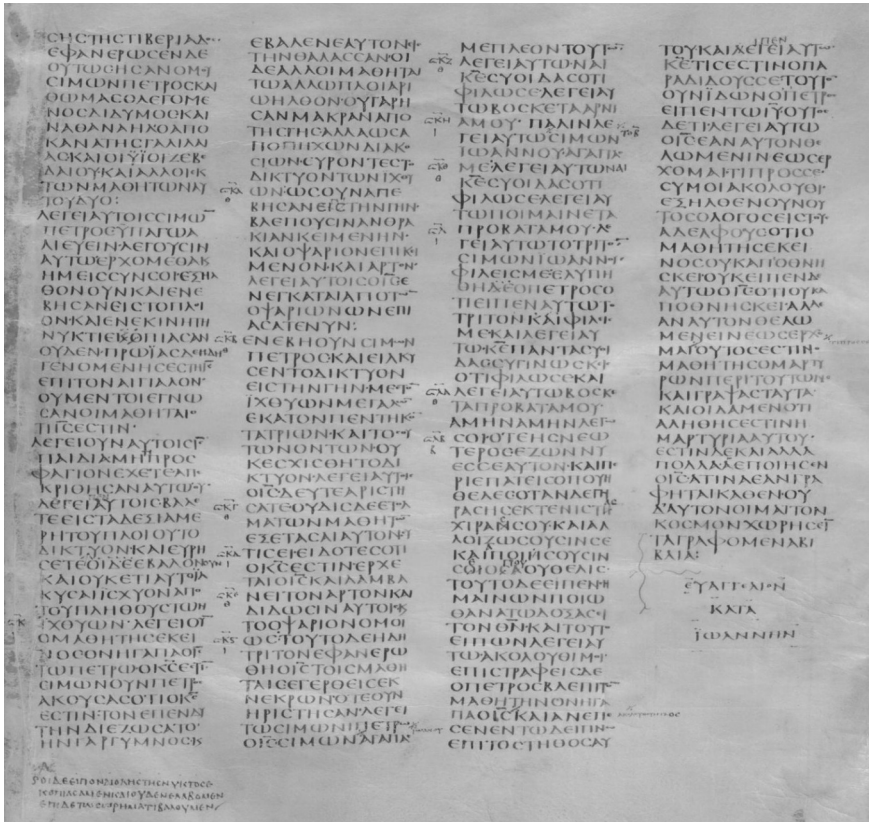


Figure 14.1. John 21:1b–25 in the 4th-century Codex Sinaiticus. The title may be seen at the end of the fourth column.

a single complete Bible of that size. It should then come as no surprise that most manuscripts were more often single books or collections of books (e.g., Gospels or Paul's epistles); even these smaller collections would have been quite costly. We should be grateful that personal access to the Scriptures no longer involves such immense personal effort and cost.

Attestation to the New Testament

Greek Manuscripts

The New Testament is easily the best-attested work from antiquity. When it comes to the number of Greek New Testament manuscripts that are extant today, we have, as it is commonly said, an "embarrassment of riches."[15] To date, we know of over 5,000 manuscripts of the New Testament that have survived down

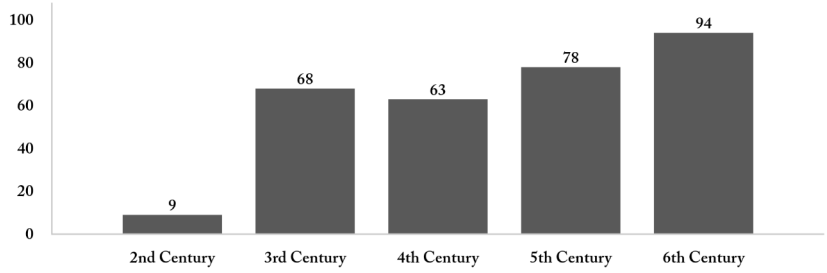


Figure 14.2. The number of extant Greek New Testament manuscripts by century.

to the present. This number makes the New Testament easily the best-attested work from antiquity and provides us with ample evidence of how the text was copied through the centuries. Yet we also want to ask, what does this attestation actually mean? We do not, for example, want to conflate the truthfulness of the text's message with its attestation. Attestation can help confirm what was originally written, but it does not tell us whether the message of the text is true. We do not want to overstate or understate what the numbers mean but to assess their significance accurately.[16] When we say we have over 5,000 manuscripts of the New Testament in Greek, we are not saying we have over 5,000 entire New Testaments. The number simply means manuscripts of any of the books from the New Testament, such that a tiny fragment of John like P52 counts as one manuscript, while a massive manuscript of all books of the New Testament like Codex Sinaiticus also counts as a single manuscript. All books of the New Testament are counted collectively regardless of size. As far as individual books or collections go, the Gospels are the best attested with over 2000 manuscripts,[17] while the most poorly attested is Revelation, coming in at a bit over 300 manuscripts.[18] About 60 or so manuscripts are complete New Testaments, only four of which are early: two from the fourth century and two from the fifth century.[19] A further qualification that we must make is that we should not understand the number to mean that there are over 5,000 ancient manuscripts. About 83% of the extant Greek manuscripts are from the year 1000 or later, while only about 218 are from the fifth century or earlier.[20] The significance of the New Testament's attestation has, unfortunately, often been overstated. When we come right down to it, the vast majority of the over 5,000 manuscripts are completely unnecessary for establishing the text of the New Testament. Having over 5,000 does not make us much

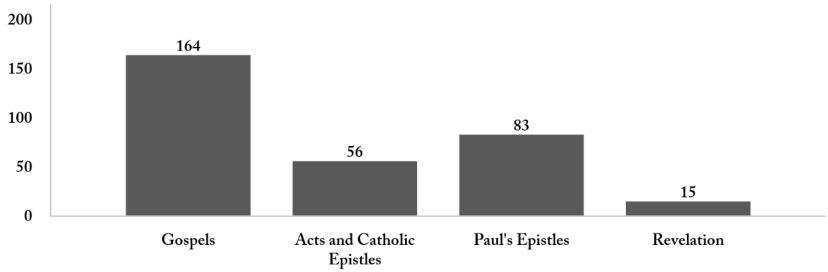


Figure 14.3. The distribution of the New Testament books in Greek manuscripts from the 2nd through 6th century.

more certain of the text of the New Testament than having, say, 500 manuscripts. After a certain point, most are just drops in the bucket and really have no effect on establishing the text because they already agree with each other. As Peterson comments,

> it is precisely this lack of effect that is important when judging reliability. If the bulk of the papyri discovered at the beginning of the twentieth century and all other manuscripts since then have not resulted in major revisions of our critical editions, then this attests to a remarkably stable text that can reliably be reconstructed even without them. The typical newly discovered manuscript is therefore likely to be both statistically insignificant and confirmatory of a reliable text.[21]

Probably the largest direct impact of having so many manuscripts is it means that there is a correspondingly large number of textual variants. Numbers from 30,000, to 200,000, to 400,000 textual variants have been thrown around. A good and up-to-date estimate is about 500,000,[22] though nobody has taken the time to count them all or to give any number with absolute precision. A word must be given regarding how these variants are counted. Over the past half-century or so, a number of apologists have made the claim that the variants are counted across all manuscripts. Norman Geisler is representative when he says, "these readings are spread throughout more than 5300 manuscripts, so that a variant spelling of one letter of one word in one verse in 2000 manuscripts is counted as 2000 'errors.'"[23] It seems that this way of counting came from Neil Lightfoot in his book *How We Got the Bible*[24] and has been subsequently picked up in many apologetic materials. The problem is that this way of counting is simply wrong. The way vari-

ants are counted is as differences in wording in a single manuscript or group of manuscripts as compared to a base text. That is, a starting point (base text) is chosen, and variants are counted for each individual difference that occurs against it in the manuscript tradition. In the actual way variants are counted, Geisler's example would be a single variant, not 2000, so we want to be sure we correctly understand how these are counted. We will have more to say about the impact of variants further below; as we shall see, the number may sound high, but most variants are easily dismissed.

Having over 5,000 Greek manuscripts for the New Testament is an enormous good for the church. While the vast number is not as significant as is often claimed, we have more than sufficient manuscript evidence to be sure that we possess the text of the New Testament substantially close to how the apostles and their associates originally wrote it. It also means that where the text differs, we are usually able to detect where these changes occurred. So while we do not want to overstate what this massive attestation can tell us, neither do we want to minimize the embarrassment of riches we possess. Rather, we want to readily acknowledge that possessing over 5,000 manuscripts gives us more material than we need to be sure that the New Testament has been reliably copied down through the centuries.

Versions

While the versions are less important for the transmission of the New Testament, they are nonetheless secondary witnesses that can be used in confirming the text of the New Testament. These would include the Latin, Coptic, Syriac, Gothic, and Armenian, among others.[25] There are many more thousands of manuscripts from the versions, the most numerous of which (unsurprisingly) is the Latin, with over 8,000 manuscripts of the Vulgate alone still extant.[26] As we discussed with the Old Testament, the versions are limited by the same types of issues, namely the need to do textual criticism on them first and the different issues that arise from translation.

Patristic Citations

We have already quoted many church fathers at length in tracing the development of the New Testament canon, but patristic citations are useful for not only canon studies but also for textual criticism of the New Testament. Since they quote the New Testament to such a large extent, they provide us with a snapshot of the text that they knew, and sometimes even discuss specific textual variants that they were aware of. Bruce Metzger has claimed that "so extensive are these citations that if all other sources for our knowledge of the text of the New Testa-



Figure 14.4. The fragmentary 4th-century manuscript, P21. Portions of Matthew 12:24–26 are here shown.

ment were destroyed, they would be sufficient alone for the reconstruction of practically the entire New Testament."[27] This is something of a rhetorical overstatement, but it gets the point across that the church fathers preserve a very large number of New Testament quotations. Patristic citations may be used as support for specific readings, but they also have some severe limitations. For one, we have to do textual criticism for the writings of the church fathers. Some church fathers, such as Irenaeus and Origen, have significant portions of their writings only preserved in translations. It is also not always clear if they were quoting a text from a manuscript right in front of them or if they were quoting from memory. At other times, it seems that church fathers felt free to adapt their citations to their context and did not feel the need to cite verbatim. Limitations aside, they are an important witness to the text of the New Testament, especially since they help give us a general timeframe for the state of the text they knew.

Text Types

The term text type is used to describe slightly different versions of the text. The three main types that are spoken of are the Alexandrian, the Western, and the Byzantine text. This terminology is falling out of use, but for the sake of simplicity, I continue to use it here with the reservation that regional terminology is not necessarily the most accurate.

The Alexandrian text type is considered by many textual scholars to be the text type that best preserves the original wording of the New Testament. It is an early text type and has early material evidence, with the best representatives being

the third-century P75 and fourth-century Codex Vaticanus (B). Its other famous fourth-century member is Codex Sinaiticus (א [pronounced *aleph*]), though this manuscript is not as well copied. The text type is generally characterized by careful copying and is overall shorter.

The Western text type is known as a freer text type, with far more variations and a character that seems more inclined to incorporate variants not known anywhere else in the textual tradition. Metzger has characterized it as having a "fondness for paraphrase," which ends up resulting in less strictness in copying the text and more freedom in providing alterations for harmonization's sake or even in adding additional material to the text.[28] It appears to be an early stream of the text. Some doubt whether Western should even be considered a text type since there is not necessarily agreement amongst the type, just a tendency for freer copying. Most of its attestation is found in Latin manuscripts, though there are some in Greek, the most notable of which is the fifth-century Codex Bezae (D).

The Byzantine text makes up the vast majority of Greek manuscripts still in existence, hence its alternate designation as the *Majority Text.* The Byzantine text appears to have arisen as a distinct text type after the move to Constantinople and the copying of manuscripts within its bounds. With the Western Church's full adoption of Latin and the Muslim conquest of much of what had once been part of the Eastern Church, Byzantium (the Eastern Roman Empire) became the sole location where Greek manuscripts were copied. Over time, this text incorporated various harmonizations, conflations, and clarifications, as well as smoothing over some of the rough edges of the text, with the result that it is slightly fuller. One of its earliest representatives is the fifth-century Codex Alexandrinus (A), which has been characterized as Byzantine in its text type of the Gospels.

Of these text types, the two main streams are the Alexandrian and the Byzantine. Oftentimes, discussions of the text types will emphasize their differences and superiority of one over the other, such that they are put into conflict with each other on opposing sides. If you are not familiar with the subject, by the way the relationship of the texts is described, you might come away with the impression that the Byzantine text is completely unreliable and has corrupted the text of the New Testament. Yet this would be an overstatement; the streams are far more similar than they are different. Recent research has been showing that the emphasis on differences has largely been overblown:

> *The entire textual stream—including the Byzantine tradition—is far more stable than previously admitted.* As mentioned above, certain scholars tend to privilege the earlier majuscules and papyri (or the so-called Alexandrian text type) and put the Byzantine tradition against it as largely corrupt and secondary; the reverse holds among Byzantine proponents.

> Only recently, however, have we been able to quantify rigorously the overall stability of the textual stream. … Put differently, the core tradition remains remarkably stable over time, in that the difference between the two texts usually thought to be most polarized is actually fairly small.[29]

The two streams of the Alexandrian and Byzantine text types affect us today through how they are incorporated into our printed texts. To that history we now turn.

Printed Texts

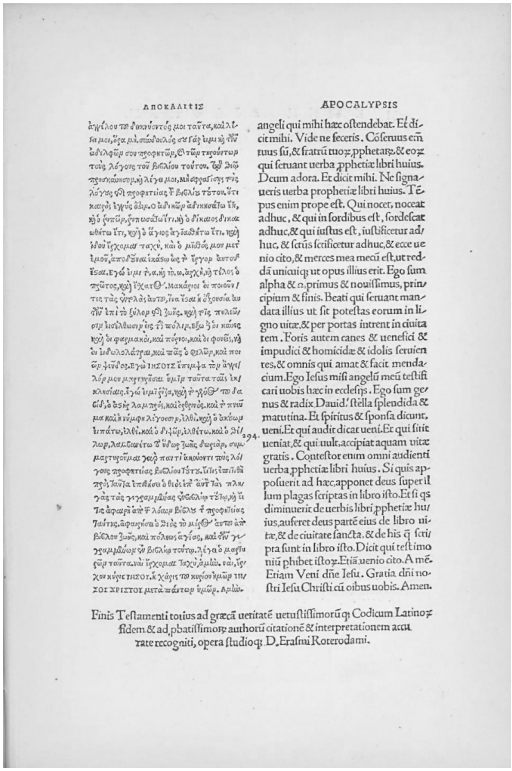
We may tend to think of the transmission process as largely complete once we reach the time of the printing press and handwritten copies become a thing of the past, but printed texts are very much part of the history of transmission. Just as individual manuscripts bring their own unique character and slight elements of variation with them, so too do the printed texts of the Greek New Testament. While this will not be an exhaustive history, it will be an overview of the elements most critical to understanding how we have the Bible in the present.

The Textus Receptus

The very first printed text of the Greek New Testament was Cardinal Ximénes's text known as the *Complutensian Polyglot*, which was printed in 1514. It did not have the distinction of being the first *published* Greek text, and its overall influence is rather minimal, though it would serve to help correct some parts of later Greek texts.

Pride of place in the history of the printed Greek New Testament must go to Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466 – 1536). Erasmus's study of the Greek New Testament led him to realize that the text of the Latin Vulgate had experienced much corruption through the centuries and that it contained some translation errors. It was his intention to provide a new Latin translation in order to correct what was commonly in circulation at the time. In 1516, he published this new translation, and to clearly demonstrate the superiority of his translation, he also placed the Greek text in a column alongside it for anyone who wished to compare it. This text was known as the *Novum Instrumentum Omne*. As Providence would have it, it was not Erasmus's new translation that would have the greatest impact but the accompanying printed Greek New Testament.

The first edition was something of a rush job. In Erasmus's own words, it was "rushed into print rather than edited,"[30] resulting in various errors in the printing; he would correct many of these in subsequent editions. A second edition was to follow in 1519, which is the text Martin Luther used to translate the New Testament into German. A third (1522), fourth (1527), and fifth (1536) edition would



ΑΠΟΚΑΛΥΨΙΣ

APOCALYPSIS

angeli qui mihi hæc ostendebat. Et dicit mihi. Vide ne feceris. Cōseruus enim tuus sū, & fratrū tuorū pphetarū, & eorū qui seruant uerba pphetiæ libri huius. Deum adora. Et dicit mihi. Ne signaueris uerba prophetiæ libri huius. Tempus enim prope est. Qui nocet, noceat adhuc, & qui in sordibus est, sordescat adhuc, & qui iustus est, iustificetur adhuc, & sctūs scrificetur adhuc, & ecce uenio cito, & merces mea mecū est, ut reddā unicuiq; ut opus illius erit. Ego sum alpha & ω. primus & nouissimus, principium & finis. Beati qui seruant mandata illius ut sit potestas eorum in ligno uitæ, & per portas intrent in ciuitatem. Foris autem canes & uenefici & impudici & homicidæ & idolis seruientes, & omnis qui amat & facit mendacium. Ego Iesus misi angelū meū testificari uobis hæc in ecclesijs. Ego sum genus & radix Dauid, stella splendida & matutina. Et spiritus & sponsa dicunt, ueni. Et qui audit dicat ueni. Et qui sitit ueniat, & qui uult, accipiat aquam uitæ gratis. Contestor enim omni audienti uerba pphetiæ libri huius. Si quis apposuerit ad hæc, apponet deus super illum plagas scriptas in libro isto. Et si quis diminuerit de uerbis libri pphetiæ huius, auferet deus partē eius de libro uitæ, & de ciuitate sancta, & de his quæ scripta sunt in libro isto. Dicit qui testimoniū phibet isto. Etiā uenio cito. Amē. Etiam Veni dñe Iesu. Gratia dñi nostri Iesu Christi cū oibus uobis. Amen.

Finis Testamenti totius ad græcā ueritatē uetustissimorū q; Codicum Latinor fidem, & ad phatissimor authorū citationē & interpretationem accurate recogniti, opera studioq; D. Erasmi Roterodami.

Figure 14.5. The final page of Revelation in Erasmus's *Novum Instrumentum Omne*. The lefthand column contains the Greek, while the righthand column contains his Latin translation.

be printed during his lifetime, making the printed Greek New Testament Erasmus's single greatest legacy, and one to which all Bible translators are greatly indebted.

The manuscripts that Erasmus worked with were all from the Byzantine text stream and were all rather late. In preparing his printed Greek text, he consulted eight manuscripts: one from the tenth or eleventh century, six from the twelfth century, and one from the fifteenth. In some instances, he incorporated readings from the Latin Vulgate which he readily recognized were not in most Greek manuscripts, such as adding the phrase "it is hard for you to kick against the pricks" in Acts 9:5. The most famous (and controversial) addition to his text that has a Latin origin is the *Comma Johanneum* of 1 John 5:7–8, which was only added into his third edition after pressure from the church. Other peculiarities in his printed edition arose because of the quality of the single manuscript of Revelation he had access to. This manuscript was actually a commentary of Andrew of Cae-

sarea on Revelation, and it was lacking a leaf that contained Revelation 22:17–21. These realities resulted in some idiosyncrasies in Erasmus's text in Revelation. In one place, the text of Revelation and the commentary got mixed up, such that he incorporated Andrew's commentary into 21:24, which reads, "and the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it" instead of the original text of "by its light will the nations walk." Furthermore, since the final verses of Revelation were lacking in his manuscript, rather than seeking out another one, Erasmus translated the final verses from Latin back into Greek, and in so doing introduced some variants into his text that are attested nowhere else in the Greek textual transmission of Revelation.[31] Because of the unique circumstances that went into the preparation of Erasmus's text, he in some ways created a new text type; and because of the nature of printing, these unique elements in his printed text were transmitted far and wide.

Two others would have a hand in transmitting the Greek throughout the sixteenth century. Robert Estienne (1503–1559), better known as Stephanus, printed four versions of the Greek text during his lifetime in 1546, 1549, 1550, and 1551. Two of these editions are notable: the third for being the first to have an apparatus listing textual variants, and the fourth edition for introducing verse divisions into his text (these verses would enter into the history of the English language through the 1560 Geneva Bible). Theodore Beza (1519–1605) published nine editions of the New Testament from 1565 to 1604, with the final tenth edition being published posthumously in 1611. Beza's editions of 1588, 1589, and 1598 were used by the translators of the King James Version. While Stephanus and Beza played a role in the various editions of the Greek New Testament, the bulk of the text went back to the work of Erasmus, with only minor variations.

This printed text that originated with the work of Erasmus is commonly known as the Textus Receptus (TR), that is, the Received Text. This has given rise to the common misconception that the TR represents the common text that has been received by the entire church. Where the name comes from is in fact a marketing blurb. The Elzevir brothers published an edition of Erasmus's text which included the phrase: "You have here, then, a text now received by all (*textum ergo habes, nunc ab omnibus receptum*), in which we give nothing altered or corrupted." While it may be true that the text was generally received by all who used the Greek since the time of its printing, it did not represent the only text that had ever been used, nor does it represent a single monolithic text.[32] It is common to refer to *the* Textus Receptus, but there is in fact no single edition of the TR; rather, there multiple editions with slightly different textual decisions.[33] At various points, the TR represents a minority stream in the history of the transmission of the text,

but because this printed text was translated into so many languages, it came to represent the definitive form of the text for much of Protestantism.

The Critical Text

As textual scholarship of the Greek New Testament increased and more manuscripts became known, scholars began to recognize and collect more and more variant readings. The first apparatus containing variant readings was produced by Stephanus in his 1550 edition. John Fell published a Greek text in 1675 with an apparatus containing readings from about 100 manuscripts. By far the most controversial text was that of John Mill in 1707, published two weeks before his death—he never lived to see the controversy he caused. His Greek text was a reprint of the 1550 Stephanus, but he had compiled a greater apparatus in consultation with Greek manuscripts, patristic citations, and early versions. He tallied about 30,000 textual variants in his study, which sparked outrage and condemnation. His harshest critic was Daniel Whitby, who "argued that the authority of the holy Scriptures was in peril and that the assembling of critical evidence was tantamount to tampering with the text."[34] Concerns about textual variation are hardly new. Textual scholarship advanced throughout the eighteenth century and on into the nineteenth century, though we must pass over many of these scholars for the sake of space.[35]

Though scholars were often critical of the TR and noted some of its deficiencies, it dominated until we come to the 1800s, which was a time of great discovery. The German scholar Constantin von Tischendorf (1815 – 1874) alone contributed greatly to these discoveries. He made a name for himself while still a student for publishing the text of Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus, a fifth-century manuscript which had had its biblical text washed off, which was then reused and written over (what is known as a *palimpsest*). He was able to decipher the underlying text, a feat that none before had been able to do with any great success. He is best known for his discovery of one of our oldest complete New Testament manuscripts, Codex Sinaiticus, at Saint Catherine's Monastery in Egypt, a story with twists and turns which has been retold many times.[36] Along with his numerous other manuscript discoveries, he published a Greek text from 1869–1872, complete with detailed documentation of the manuscripts he had consulted.[37] Soon after Tischendorf's text, the greatest shift in textual scholarship would come through the combined work of Brooke Foss Westcott (1825 – 1901) and Fenton John Anthony Hort (1828 – 1892). In 1881, they published a Greek New Testament largely based upon the two fourth-century manuscripts Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus, the latter of which Tischendorf had not had access to. The argumentation of Westcott and Hort and the publication of their Greek text marked a decided shift

in preference toward what came to be known as the Alexandrian text type, a preference that is still generally held today amongst textual scholars. The text that we now commonly know as the *critical text*, from which our English Bibles are largely translated, has its roots in the work of Westcott and Hort.

In 1898, Eberhard Nestle published a Greek text known as the *Novum Testamentum Graece*.[38] This edition was printed not in consultation with manuscripts, but in consultation with other printed texts, namely those of Tischendorf and Westcott and Hort, and where those differed, he consulted a third printed text: either that of Richard Weymouth's 1892 text, or later that of Bernard Weiss (1894–1900). In 1927, Eberhard's son, Erwin Nestle, published the 13th edition of the text, for the first time with an apparatus that referenced the readings of various manuscripts. When Kurt Aland became a co-editor of the text during the 1950s, he contributed greatly in increasing the number of manuscripts referenced in the apparatus. In 1979, due to the great number of manuscript discoveries in the twentieth century, the 26th edition underwent an overhaul of both its apparatus and main body of the text to take into account the latest discoveries. The *Novum Testamentum Graece* is now in its 28th edition, which contains an updated textual apparatus but still reproduces the same text as the 26th edition. A 29th edition is forthcoming, which is expected to introduce some changes into the main body of the text, rather than only in the apparatus. This printed text often goes by the name of Nestle-Aland due to its two major editors and is often abbreviated along with the number of the edition, such that the 28th edition is the NA28. A version of the same printed text developed for translators was produced by the United Bible Societies; it is currently on its fifth edition. It is often abbreviated like the Nestle-Aland text, such that we can speak about the UBS5. The main difference between the NA text and the UBS text is in the apparatus, not in the text itself. The NA apparatus is more robust, but it also notes variants that have no impact on translation. The UBS text provides an apparatus that is designed for translators, so only variants that could have some impact on translations are printed, using a rating system to evaluate the strength of the readings that are noted.

Printed Texts in Translation

Where the rubber really meets the road in the history of the transmission of the text of the New Testament is through the printed texts of the TR and the critical text. We can talk about individual manuscripts all day, but the fact of the matter is that none of our English Bibles are translated directly from a single manuscript; they are all from either the TR or the critical text. All translations from Tyndale up to the KJV in 1611 used a version of the TR, whether that of Erasmus, Stephanus, or Beza, or as in the case of the KJV, a combination of multiple ver-

sions of the TR. Nowadays, with the exception of the NKJV and the MEV, all major modern English translations are based on the critical text as found in the NA or UBS text. The greatest difference that results is that the New Testament of modern translations are slightly shorter since they translate from a slightly shorter Greek text. Since verses were added by Stephanus in 1551 in the slightly longer TR stream, the critical text is technically "missing" verses because the standard versification is based upon the longer printed text.[39] So when you hear that modern Bibles are removing verses, it's not that they are taking out verses they don't like, but the Greek manuscripts that the critical text was based upon did not contain those words, and so this is reflected in the printed text and then in translations. There are no nefarious plots, and modern translations are usually transparent in the footnotes about why a verse is shorter or missing.

Unfortunately, the textual differences that appear when we compare Bible translations have very often led to acrimonious debates and rather hyperbolic statements. From one side, you have the argument that modern translations are changing and corrupting the Word of God, to the point that some could say that modern versions are based on "Old corrupt manuscripts,"[40] making them "untrustworthy" to the point that they "lead Bible-believing Christians astray."[41] From the other, you might hear that the KJV is based on inferior manuscripts, and so is not as reliable, as when Metzger says the KJV was translated from the "late and corrupt text of Erasmus as popularized and modified slightly by Stephanus and Beza."[42] Unfortunately, in discussions of which text is better, I do not think this point is emphasized enough, so I want to say it here: *whether you choose to read from a Bible that was translated from the TR or one that has been translated from the critical text, you are reading the Word of God.* The similarities between the TR and critical text Bible translations are far greater than their differences, and the differences that do exist are overall quite minor in nature.

Do We Have the Original Words of the New Testament?

In the course of the hundreds of years of copying, did the text of the New Testament really make it down to us? To hear Ehrman's popular presentations, we are just left with copies of copies of copies and the differences are so vast that the text is a hopeless muddle. Perhaps the best person to help contextualize Ehrman's sensationalized popular presentation is Ehrman himself, here writing in a college textbook:

> The vast majority of these hundreds of thousands of differences are completely and utterly unimportant and insignificant and don't matter at all. By far the most common differences simply show us that scribes in the ancient world could spell no better than most people can today (and the scribes didn't have spell-

> check!). If we really want to know what the apostle Paul had to say about the importance of Jesus' death and resurrection, does it matter to us how he spelled the word "resurrection"? Probably not. Moreover, lots of other kinds of differences in our manuscripts—as we will see—are easy to explain and don't affect the meaning of the writings in the least.
>
> But there is also some more bad news. There are lots of differences that do matter a lot. They may not completely reverse the teachings of the New Testament: when the Bible says that "God is love," we don't have manuscripts that claim the opposite, that "God is hate"! But, as we will see, they do affect how we interpret important passages of the books of the New Testament, and sometimes they affect significant teachings of the biblical authors.[43]

What Ehrman deems "significant" is not quite as significant as he thinks, as we will see when we look at some significant variants below. He continues on further to say,

> I don't want to mislead you into thinking that scholars believe that we can never have any idea what Luke—or any of our other New Testament authors—actually wrote. For most passages, most sentences, most words, scholars are reasonably confident that we can know—even if there are other passages that remain in doubt. To help them decide what an author originally wrote, scholars have devised certain guidelines—criteria—to get around the problem that our manuscripts have so many mistakes in them.[44]

Ehrman then goes on to describe text-critical principles by which we are able to determine what is most likely the original reading. He concludes by saying,

> As I have indicated, even though there are enormous problems in establishing what the authors of the New Testament originally wrote, in most instances textual critics are reasonably certain that they know. But there remain many places where there is considerable doubt. For that reason, in a very tangible way, we really don't have the original New Testament. There are instances in which we simply don't know what the authors wrote, and in most of these instances, we probably never will know.[45]

On the whole, Ehrman gives a very fair assessment of the state of affairs. Most variants have very little effect upon the text of the New Testament, and most are simply meaningless. From the manuscripts that we possess, we are, in Ehrman's words, "reasonably certain" that we know exactly what was written in the majority of cases. However, he raises a very high bar where any textual uncertainty means we cannot speak of the original New Testament, a bar which need not be

so high. If we are uncertain of certain small features (refer to my example in Chapter 12), we do not lose the meaning or message of the text.

In popular level writings, Ehrman likes to raise the specter of how corrupted the New Testament text may have become *before* the earliest manuscripts we have in existence: "If we have very few early copies—in fact, scarcely any—how can we know that the text was not changed significantly before the New Testament began to be reproduced in such large quantities?"[46] The implication is that the earliest text could be miles away from what it originally said, yet this radical skepticism is not called for, nor does Ehrman in reality operate with this assumption. Ehrman's theory of the orthodox corruption of Scripture[47]—which is his greatest contribution to textual criticism—rests upon the notion that we can substantially know the original wording. If that were not the case, then he could never posit any locations where he deems the scribes to have changed the text for theological reasons. The rapid dissemination of New Testament manuscripts to various regions of the Mediterranean world as well as its relatively early translation into other languages largely dispels any skepticism about how much the text could have changed in the earliest period. The wild copying he envisions would not be uniform, and we would not be left with the rather stable text that we see. Even in the places where we are unsure of the precise original wording, the original wording has not been lost; it is still preserved in the manuscript tradition. As Eldon Epp has put it, "we have so many manuscripts of the NT and that these manuscripts contain so many variant readings that surely the original reading in every case is somewhere present in our vast store of material."[48] He further adds, "If, then, the original reading in virtually every case is somewhere present in our raw material, the only problem is how to find that original reading — and, by extension, how to find the original text of the Greek NT as a whole."[49] The reason for this is what Kurt and Barbara Aland have referred to as the "tenacity" of the textual tradition, by which they mean "the stubborn resistance of readings and text types to change."[50] This is "what makes it possible to retrace the original text of the New Testament through a broad range of witnesses."[51] That is to say, when a variant was introduced, it tended to remain in the textual tradition rather than disappear completely. This would apply to the original reading just as much as to later units of variation. This leads the Alands to determine that tenacity means that text critics should assume that "in every instance of textual variation it is possible to determine the form of the original text."[52] In the places where we are not sure of the best reading, the original reading is found in either the text or the footnote, as Dan Wallace is fond of saying.

Asking whether we have the original words calls for a contextualization of the nature of textual variation. There are probably over 500,000 variants, far more

than the approximately 138,000 words in the New Testament. Yet the vast majority of these variants can simply be dismissed outright. Wallace breaks down textual variation into four helpful categories:[53]

- The largest group of textual variants by far is spelling or nonsense errors. These are easily recognized and set to the side.
- The next largest group of variants involve viable yet not meaningful differences. These involve minor changes such as synonyms or slight textual alterations in Greek that make no difference in meaning and are unnoticeable in English translations.
- The third largest group are those that could be considered meaningful but not viable. That is, the variant changes the meaning of the text, but could not possibly be original due to its late or completely unique nature.
- The smallest group, and the only one of any significance, are those variants that are both meaningful and viable. They have enough support that they could possibly be original, and they alter the meaning of the text in some small way. Less than one percent of textual variation falls into this category.

What does a meaningful and viable variant look like? We could ask the question of whether Paul said in Romans 8:2 "the law of the Spirit of life has set *you* free" or "*me* free." Or in Romans 5:1, did he say, "*we hav*e peace" or "*let us* have peace"? Or did Mark's Gospel start with the words "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ" or "of Jesus Christ, *the son of God*"? When we talk about meaningful and viable variants, these types of variants are representative of the types of uncertainty that exist. An example of a more significant meaningful and viable variant might be Luke 23:34 where Jesus prays from the cross, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." Yet this prayer is missing from a number of early manuscripts and may not have been original to the text. Does it impact the account of the crucifixion? Most definitely. Does it significantly impact how we understand Jesus and his sacrifice? Not in the least. These types of textual issues are not hidden, for most modern English translations will provide footnotes alerting you to where textual variants could have some impact upon how we might understand the text. As Wallace points out, where no footnote exists, "translation teams have a high degree of confidence that the words in their English translation accurately represent the words of the New Testament as they were originally written."[54]

So do we have the original words of the New Testament with 100% accuracy? Probably not, but we can probably say with over 95% certainty, and of that 5% we might be unsure of, less than 1% of it even affects the meaning of the text to any degree. The macro-level of the message of the New Testament is unaffected.

Conclusion

The transmission of the text of the New Testament is indeed a complicated subject, but it is one that is sensationalized far too often. There are no conspiracies to alter the New Testament nor have there ever been any, and the text is not so hopelessly corrupted that it is lost to history. The reality is that the text was copied faithfully through the centuries, though it accrued some small additions along the way which have little overall material impact upon the message of the New Testament. The age of the printing press brings the New Testament down to our present day, but also brings with it its own peculiarities. While we may not necessarily have the text of the New Testament reconstructed with 100% accuracy, those few uncertainties do not alter the meaning of the New Testament in any real material way. God has not left us without a witness; the message that the apostles preached and wrote down is the same message that we have today.

Further Reading

Hixson, Elijah and Peter J. Gurry, eds. *Myths and Mistakes in New Testament Textual Criticism*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019.

Metzger, Bruce M. and Bart D. Ehrman. *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoratio*n. 4th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

15.
How Textual Variation Impacts Us Today

The transmission process can be messy. Manuscripts differ from one another, and some of this variation impacts our Bible translations today. Sometimes variation is sensationalized to the point that it is presented as resulting in drastic differences between Bible translations that vastly change the meaning of the text. What I want to do in this chapter is to look at some of the most controversial and sensational variants, explain how text critical decisions impact them, and then look at much more typical variants. Because variants in the New Testament are overall more controversial, we will spend more time with them.

Old Testament

For the most part, our translations of the Old Testament follow the Masoretic Text (MT), some more so than others. Where translators choose to go against the readings in the MT, we encounter differences in our Bible translations. While there are many different variants we could look at, these are some that are notable and instructive for the kinds of variation that may affect our translations of the Old Testament.

Psalm 145:13

NKJV: Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, And Your dominion endures throughout all generations.

NASB: Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, And Your dominion endures throughout all generations. *The Lord is faithful in His words, And holy in all His works.*

The NKJV follows the MT precisely, while the NASB provides the additional line on the evidence of the LXX and the Syriac, which is supported by one of the DSS (11QPs[a]). Psalm 145 is an acrostic Psalm, which means that each line begins with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet. As the Psalm is preserved in the MT, it goes from the letter *mem* straight to the letter *samek* and skips a line with the letter *nun*. It appears that at some point, this line had accidentally dropped out of the MT. The LXX preserved this line, and we could infer that it was once a part of the Hebrew. The recovery of the DSS confirmed that Hebrew did indeed once stand behind this verse, and so translations like the NASB restore it into the translation.

Psalm 22:16

NET: Yes, wild dogs surround me— a gang of evil men crowd around me; *like a lion* they pin my hands and feet.

NIV: Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me; *they pierce* my hands and my feet.

The vast majority of English translations go against the MT at this point, while the NET is one of the few English translations that follows it. The difference comes down to a single word in Hebrew, and one which takes a bit of creativity to resolve. The NET translation notes provide an excellent discussion of the difficulties with the passage. The LXX reading is "they dug my hands and my feet," which is interpreted to mean "pierced." This same understanding is reflected in the Latin and Syriac as well. The MT has the reading "like a lion," which in Hebrew is *k'ari* (כארי). The first letter is a prefix meaning "like" or "as" attached to a word that means "lion." A manuscript from the Judean Desert, 5/6HevPs, includes a reading that says *karu* (כארו), which has a final *vav* (ו) instead of a final *yod* (י). In the Hebrew of this time, spelling was not always standardized, and so it has been proposed that *karu* (כארו) is a variant spelling of *karu* (כרו), meaning "they dug," with an unneeded *aleph* (א) inserted in the middle. If this reconstruction is correct, it agrees with what we find in the versions. We could imagine several scenarios whereby *karu* (כרו) morphed into *k'ari* (כארי), such as the final *vav* (ו) being mistaken for a *yod* (י) and a scribe correcting the form to something that made sense. Or we could imagine that the variant spelling *karu* (כארו) was dominant in

the proto-MT and the final *vav* was written too short so as to appear as a *yod*. In any case, we are not able to resolve the matter completely, but we have a good reconstruction which can account for the reading found in the versions.

Deuteronomy 32:43

KJV: Rejoice, O *ye nations*, with *his people*: for he will avenge the blood of his *servants*, and will render vengeance to his adversaries, and will be *merciful* unto *his land*, and to *his people.*

ESV: "Rejoice with him, *O heavens; bow down to him, all gods*, for he avenges the blood of his *children* and takes vengeance on his adversaries. *He repays those who hate him* and *cleanses* his *people's land*."

The KJV follows the MT for this passage, while the ESV prefers readings found in the DSS, LXX, and Vulgate. There is no way for sure to know why the MT differs to such an extent, but some of the changes appear too great to be accidental. It has been suggested that the MT reflects theological changes where the text was slightly altered to prevent a polytheistic understanding of *elohim* (gods). This is strengthened by the difference earlier in 32:8, where the DSS and the LXX read God fixed the borders "according to the number of the *sons of God*," while the MT reads "*sons of Israel*."[1] The wording is too different for these variants to be accounted for as simply accidental in the MT, and while we cannot impute motive with a high degree of confidence, the alteration in the MT appears to be intentional. Given the agreement between the DSS manuscript 4Qdeut^{q} and the LXX in this passage, the ESV preferred its reading as more likely to be original to that of the later MT.

As a side note, it is also worth mentioning that Hebrews 1:6 appears to follow the LXX reading of this passage when it says, "Let all God's angels worship him." The Hebrew word for "gods" is rendered as "angels of God" or "sons of God" in the LXX, the latter of which is simply an alternative way to say "angels." The part of the LXX passage in question could be rendered as "Rejoice, O heavens, with him, and let all the angels of God worship him,"[2] which corresponds closely to Hebrews 1:6.

New Testament

The textual history of the New Testament has an impact upon our English Bibles in the form of slight textual variation. Where this is most readily apparent is in a comparison of Bible translations based on the Textus Receptus (TR)—the KJV and NKJV being the major representatives—and practically all other modern translations, which are translated from the critical text. While textual variation exists across manuscripts, we do not see variation at that level. We see textual vari-

ation at the level of the printed Greek texts, which are both the product of textual criticism and of giving weight to manuscripts from different time periods. We will here consider the most notable (and sometimes controversial!) textual variations that affect our translations, and then look at more representative examples.

1 John 5:7–8

NIV: For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement.

KJV: For there are three that bear record *in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth*, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.

Of all variation between the TR and the critical text, the *Comma Johanneum* is likely the most controversial. In the KJV, we find the clearest prooftext for the doctrine of the Trinity, yet it is completely lacking in the NIV and all other modern translations. Many claims have been thrown about that this is part of a conspiracy in modern Bible translations to diminish the doctrine of the Trinity. Though this is perhaps the most controversial variant, it is also very clear in terms of its unoriginality. No Greek manuscript includes the longer phrase before the fourteenth century. In fact, Erasmus's first two editions of his Greek text did not include the passage because he could not find it in the Greek; it was common in Latin manuscripts but had no basis in the Greek. Only after a Greek manuscript could be provided did Erasmus insert the passage in his third edition, but even then he still believed it was not original to the text.[3] Thus, while the reading is in a very tiny minority of late Greek manuscripts, it became widespread through its inclusion in the printed Greek text of the day. When it comes to textual decisions, this is probably as clear as it gets, for it is absolutely certain that these words were not original to John. The only real reason it is controversial is because of its long inclusion in English Bibles, especially the KJV, via the TR. If the variant had never been included in a printed Greek text, it is doubtful that it would broach any great notice in English translations.

As a theological aside, it should be noted that the doctrine of the Trinity does not stand or fall on this verse. In fact, the doctrine of the Trinity was ably defended without the longer reading, and it was believed long before the addition made its way into the Latin textual tradition.

Mark 16:9–20

Due to the length of the passage, I will not reproduce the text here. You will usually find this text included within brackets or some other marks indicating a change in the text, along with a footnote noting that some early manuscripts lack

these verses. This is one of only two places of major textual variation in the textual tradition of the New Testament.

The TR tradition (KJV/NKJV) reflects the majority of the textual tradition, as the longer ending is included in the vast majority of manuscripts. The critical text tradition (modern translations) express doubt due to the lack of the longer ending in the two very notable fourth-century manuscripts, Codex Sinaiticus (א [*aleph*]) and Codex Vaticanus (B).[4] In fact, of all extant Greek manuscripts, only these two manuscripts and the twelfth-century manuscript GA 304 lack it, though we could also cite manuscripts from Latin, Syriac, Armenian, and Georgian. All other Greek manuscripts that attest to this portion of Mark include the longer ending (eight others also include the so-called "shorter ending" after verse 8 before continuing onto the longer ending). The age of א and B weigh in favor of the longer ending not being original, but the variant is not quite so simple as saying that oldest manuscripts lack it. Both Irenaeus and the *Diatessaron* show knowledge of the longer ending as far back as the second century. Furthermore, both א and B have internal evidence that the scribes who copied the manuscripts were aware of the longer ending but did not include it. Internally, the verses read as an addition to the text. Mary Magdalene was already introduced in 16:1, but verse 9 introduces her all over again as if she had not been previously mentioned. This suggests that these verses may have originated in a different written account and were appended to the end of Mark. How to weigh the evidence? It seems likely that verses 9–20 are not original to the text, but that does not necessarily mean they are a late addition. Mark's Gospel ends rather abruptly, and it is not surprising that this ending should have been felt to be wanting. It is conceivable that this ending was added within the first century or early second century. There is nothing objectionable about the longer ending of Mark; it simply appears to be a harmonization of the ending of Matthew and Luke, along with some influence from Acts.

John 7:53–8:11

Again, due to the length of the passage, I do not reproduce the text. The story of the woman caught in adultery is one of the most beloved stories of Jesus. It is also the second of the two major units of variation found in the New Testament. Aside from this section and the longer ending of Mark, all other units of textual variation are at the word or sentence level.

Most modern translations will include some indication that the story of the woman caught in adultery, known as the *Pericope Adulterae*, is most likely not original to John's Gospel. The reason why they include this note is because a wide variety of early Greek manuscripts do not include it, nor do versions like the ear-

liest forms of the Syriac, Sahidic, Achmimic, and Bohairic. Though most manuscripts that do include the pericope place it after 7:52, it is a moveable passage and is found in John's Gospel after 7:36 and 21:25, in addition to even being found in Luke's Gospel after 21:38.[5] This widespread absence and movability strongly points toward the passage not being original to what John wrote. Yet its absence from John's Gospel does not therefore imply it is an untrue story; it may reflect an oral tradition of Jesus that was incorporated into the Gospel later. The story may have been known by Papias, who mentions a story of a woman "who was accused of many sins before the Lord, which is contained in the Gospel according to the Hebrews."[6] The third-century Syriac *Didascalia Apostolorum* shows knowledge of the story, as do significant fourth- and fifth-century figures like Ambrose,[7] Jerome,[8] and Augustine,[9] who each know of it as part of John's Gospel. It is indeed an early story about Jesus, though it is simply not one that John recorded in his Gospel.

Colossians 1:14

NASB: …in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

NJKV: …in whom we have redemption *through His blood*, the forgiveness of sins.

Here we have what appears to be parallel influence from Ephesians 1:17. It seems likely that the phrase is a case where memory influenced the scribe or the scribe thought he was correcting the text. The text preserved in the NASB is more likely to be original, for we do not find the fuller version in the Greek manuscript tradition until the ninth century. We should also note that there is no real theological difference; though "through his blood" is lacking in the NASB in Colossians, the phrase is preserved in Ephesians 1:17 and, I would argue, is implied by Paul in Colossians rather than explicitly stated.

Mark 10:40–41

ESV: And a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, "If you will, you can make me clean." *Moved with pity*, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, "I will; be clean."

NIV: A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." *Jesus was indignant.* He reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!"

While textual differences are primarily found between critical text and TR translations, occasionally they can be also found between modern translations of the critical tex. Translators make text critical decisions as well and will sometimes go

with readings that are in the footnotes rather than in the body of the NA/UBS texts. In this instance, the translators of the NIV believed that Jesus being angry was the better reading, following the textual canon of preferring the harder reading. The external evidence for this reading is not strong, however; it is only found in Greek in the fifth-century Codex Bezae—a manuscript famous for its unique readings—and a few Latin manuscripts. This is one case where the NIV's preference for the harder reading is probably applied a little overzealously in the face of overwhelming external evidence.

Mark 2:16

MEV: When the scribes and Pharisees saw Him eating with *tax collectors and sinners*, they said to His disciples, "How is it that He eats *and drinks* with tax collectors and sinners?"

CSB: When the scribes who were Pharisees saw that he was eating with *sinners and tax collectors*, they asked his disciples, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

This passage represents another example of harmonization between the Gospel accounts. The parallel passage in Luke 5:30 contains the phrase "eats and drinks," and it appears that Mark was harmonized to Luke during the copying process. Additionally, there is a reversal of the order of "sinners and tax collectors" for "tax collectors and sinners," a variant which has no impact upon meaning and is easy to miss.

Matthew 18:11

ESV: [Does not exist; noted in a footnote on v. 10]

KJV: For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.

We return to our example from the preface. Does this represent a verse being "removed" from the Bible? Technically, yes, but not in the sensationalized way. Remember that verses were added to the Greek New Testament in 1551. What this means is that verses were added to a fuller version of the Greek text. When compared to the slightly shorter critical text, those words did not exist in those earlier manuscripts, and so the verse number is skipped since there is nowhere to put it without changing the verse numbering. What we see here is a case of harmonization in the fuller text. While this phrase may not exist here in the ESV, it does in the parallel passage of Luke 19:10. The passage from Luke was apparently harmonized in Matthew so that the later, fuller manuscripts include it in both places.

John 1:18

ESV: No one has ever seen God; the only *God*, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

NKJV: No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten *Son*, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.

Although it may look like there are two textual issues, there is only one here. There is a translational question of whether *monogenes* should be translated as "only unique" or "only begotten;" there is no textual issue at this point. The textual difference is in whether John originally wrote *theos* (God) or *huios* (Son). The vast majority of manuscripts support the reading of "Son," but the fourth-century Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, along with the late second/early third-century P75 and P66 support the reading of "God." Externally, the early evidence tips slightly in favor of the reading of "God." We could explain the reading of "Son" in terms of intentional or accidental harmonization with John 3:16 and 3:18, which contain the phrase "only (begotten) Son." Alternatively, since *nomina sacra* were used from an early date, the difference between the two words would have been a single letter: ΥC (Son) and ΘC (God). Though the letters are not incredibly similar, it is entirely possible that the scribe simply wrote the wrong letter one way or the other.

This is one of those meaningful and viable variants where we are not entirely sure of what the original reading should be. Many favor the reading of "God" due to the early evidence, but it is a minority reading in terms of manuscripts. There is a slight nuance in terms of what the text here communicates, with the reading of "God" further highlighting the divinity of Christ. Yet the reading of "Son" does not diminish it, for John's prologue establishes it clearly right from 1:1.

Does Textual Variation Mean We Do Not Have the Word of God?

A question that you may be asking yourself at this point is, if there is so much textual variation in the Bible, even if much of it is minor, how can we say that we still have the Word of God? If textual variation means that the text is no longer the Word of God, well that would imply that we never truly ever had it since all manuscripts differ. It is just this sort of idea that Bart Ehrman very often promotes. Ehrman grew up in what appears to have been a fundamentalist Christian background and seems to have taken an all-or-nothing approach to the Bible. He studied at Moody Bible Institute, and then at Wheaton College, and finally at Princeton Theological Seminary. During his studies, he began to learn about the text of the New Testament and of the textual variation that exists amongst the manuscripts, and this caused him to abandon the faith of his youth and to eventually become an agnostic. In his book *Misquoting Jesus,* Ehrman describes how this

study led him from fully believing in the inerrancy of Scripture to fully repudiating any notion of the divine origin of the Bible:

> I kept reverting to my basic question: how does it help us to say that the Bible is the inerrant word of God if in fact we don't have the words that God inerrantly inspired, but only the words copied by the scribes—sometimes correctly but sometimes (many times!) incorrectly? What good is it to say that the autographs (i.e., the originals) were inspired? We don't have the originals! We have only error-ridden copies, and the vast majority of these are centuries removed from the originals and different from them, evidently, in thousands of ways.[10]

He continues by laying out the theological implications he drew from all of these errors and variations in the copies of the New Testament:

> This became a problem for my view of inspiration, for I came to realize that it would have been no more difficult for God to preserve the words of scripture than it would have been for him to inspire them in the first place. If he wanted his people to have his words, surely he would have given them to them (and possibly even given them the words in a language they could understand, rather than Greek and Hebrew). The fact that we don't have the words surely must show, I reasoned, that he did not preserve them for us. And if he didn't perform that miracle, there seemed to be no reason to think that he performed the earlier miracle of inspiring those words.[11]

Ehrman essentially seems to have exchanged one form of fundamentalism for another, and he carries forward the same assumptions: the copies of the New Testament must be absolutely perfect, or else the Word of God does not exist or can never be known. If all manuscripts differ to one degree or another—and they do—does that mean that God has not preserved his word? If there is uncertainty at certain points in the texts of our Bibles—and there is—does that mean that we cannot speak with certainty of anything of the message of Scripture? Ehrman and others like to suggest that such conclusions follow, but that is simply not the case. If all we are focused on are the minutia of specific words, it is very easy to see how we could end up in a morass of doubt. But take a step back and look at the bigger picture. Ask yourself, have the differences in the text changed the meaning and message of Scripture? Do you come away with vastly different ideas of who God is and the way of salvation if you read the NKJV and then read the NIV? I would certainly hope your answer is no; if your answer is yes, I would be curious as to why. The entire macro-picture of the message of Scripture remains intact: there is one God who is the creator of heaven and earth; there is one Lord, Jesus Christ,

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, who was crucified, died, and was buried, and who rose again from the dead on the third day; there is forgiveness of sins in Christ; there is a new covenant made in his blood; there is the promise of the Holy Spirit; there is one Lord, one faith, one church, one baptism, one God and Father of all. This and much more. The message is exactly the same. Sure, there may be some places where passages cannot be used to support a doctrine (e.g., 1 John 5:7–8) or have slightly different nuances, but the central doctrines of the Christian faith do not rest on a single passage. I would be willing to bet that even in the most (unintentionally) error-ridden manuscript of the New Testament, the message it communicates is not corrupted.

Now the idea that textual variation undermines the authority of Scripture is not a new charge. It is one that Erasmus faced and answered in his day with his Greek text and his attempts at restoration of the Latin. While his words are now over five hundred years old, they are well worth quoting at length here:

> Now, should there be any who fear that, if a change is anywhere introduced, the authority of sacred literature will be called into question, they should know that already for a thousand years the manuscripts, whether Latin or Greek, have not agreed in every respect. Agreement would not, in fact, be possible, given not only the large number of copyists but also their ignorance, carelessness, and indiscretion – not to mention the many alterations made by the semi-educated or, at least, the inattentive.[12]

He appeals to ancient history:

> Already in his day Origen complained about puzzling variations in the Gospels. In their public liturgies the Greek church reads one text, the Western church another. About the time of Jerome, some churches were following the Septuagint translation, while some were embracing the new translation made from the original Hebrew. Even later than this, the churches of Gaul were reading one text, the churches of Rome another. Finally, if you inspect the old manuscript codices that were used in those times in public worship, you will scarcely find two that agree with each other. Certainly it is clear that Augustine used manuscripts that were not free from faults. And yet all down through the centuries the authority of Scripture has stood firm. If textual variation in the manuscripts completely deprives the Scriptures of their reliability, then, remember, there is manuscript variation in the Hebrew, in the Greek, and in the Latin.[13]

He cuts to the heart of the matter of whether the ravages of time corrupt the authority of Scripture:

> I wholeheartedly support those who preach the inviolable authority of the divine Scriptures. One who knowingly corrupts them insults the Holy Spirit. I acknowledge this. But the sovereignty of Scripture lies in the originals themselves. Isaiah did not err, nor does anyone try to alter what he wrote. Matthew did not stumble; no one corrects what he recorded. Our concern is with the translators, with the scribes, with the corruptors. But if all authority collapses because of a certain number of corrupt passages, the Holy Spirit ought to have attended the copyists as he did the prophets and evangelists. The Holy Spirit is present everywhere but exerts his force in such a way as to leave some of the work for us to do. That inviolable authority of Scripture stopped with the prophets and apostles or evangelists. But it is the great glory of Scripture that, although re-expressed so often in so many languages, so often mutilated or corrupted by heretics, contaminated in so many ways by the carelessness of scribes, it nevertheless retains the vigour of eternal truth. So the church, constantly shaken by all the storm winds of adversity, stands firm. But one who has, to the best of his ability, restored to its original integrity what human beings have corrupted serves the Holy Spirit.[14]

My wish, and I suspect everyone's wish, would be the same as that of Erasmus: "I too would wish that in sacred literature nothing was corrupt, nowhere was there any disagreement. And yet, while it is easy to wish for this, it never has been the fact, nor, I think, ever will be."[15] Disagreement between manuscripts is the situation that God has given us. We must acknowledge that it is God who has left us with the reality of textual variation, and we must approach the matter according to the reality that God has established. We do not want to set up a standard (i.e., absolute textual certainty) that does not accord with what God has done. Just as we must perform the task of interpreting Scripture, so too must we interpret the manuscript evidence to determine what best preserved Scripture closest to its original form. God did not see fit to perfectly protect his Word against scribal errors, and so we have work to do to evaluate the copies. Yet God sufficiently preserved his Word. We have not been left without a witness, for the Scripture always and indeed "retains the vigour of eternal truth."

Conclusion

The vicissitudes of the copying process impact us in the present, and we feel its effects in the textual differences that exist in our Bible translations. If you have ever been in a Bible study where people had different Bible translations, it will not take long to realize that there is some variation between them. Some of these units of variation can be difficult to sort out, while others are relatively straightforward.

Yet for all the differences we may find, most are minor and would likely escape our notice but for someone pointing them out. We should approach these differences with our eyes wide open and not hide them. We should freely acknowledge them in the confidence that the Word of God is sufficiently preserved, and that even in these differences, the Word of God stands firm and its message remains clear.

Further Reading

Metzger, Bruce M. *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*. 2nd ed. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994.

Part 4: The Translation of Scripture

16.
How Bible Translation Works

In the United States, most native-born Americans are monolingual—that is, they only speak one language: English. In general, this means that most Americans have very little practical experience for relating to how translation works. I have found that this state of affairs can result in the biblical languages being given a level of mystique, such that the languages themselves are thought to carry hidden mysteries just below the surface of the translation. I have heard of Hebrew described as a "heart language" and Greek as a "mind language,"[1] and I have heard statements that Greek is so much more expressive and precise that we just cannot get the meaning across properly in English. This idea is seen in the preface to the Amplified Version, which claims to "reveal, together with the single English word equivalent to each key Hebrew and Greek word, any other clarifying meanings that may be concealed by the traditional translation method."[2] This idea that meaning is concealed or locked in the original languages seems to lead to questions like, "so what does the Greek *really* say in this verse?" To which the answer often is, "exactly what it says in English." Since Bible translation can be a mystery for monolingual English speakers, I hope to demystify it to some extent in this chapter by helping you understand some of what goes into translation. If you are competent in another language, then what follows will be mostly common sense. But since I am writing for an American audience, and most native-born Americans are monolingual, I hope this chapter will help give those monolingual readers

an appreciation for the difficulty of translation, as well as increased trust that they truly have access to the Word of God in English with nothing hidden from them.

Translation Philosophies

When it comes to Bible translation, there are two basic translation philosophies: *formal equivalence* and *functional equivalence*. Formal equivalence is also known as literal or word-for-word translation, while functional equivalence has been known as dynamic equivalence, thought-for-thought, or meaning-for-meaning translation. While the two philosophies differ in approach somewhat, the reality is that they overlap with each other, and all translations fall on a spectrum of how often they follow one approach over the other. Understanding the differences in approaches between the two will help you understand why translations differ and how to evaluate what is happening when they differ.

Formal equivalence translation attempts to best represent the *words* and *form* of the text as closely as possible while still communicating in proper English. Where a verb was a passive verb in the source language, it will be passive in English. Where there is correspondence between words in the source language, there will be attempted correspondence in English. If there are redundant words (e.g., "he answered and said"), the redundant words will be retained. Passages translated in a formal manner will overall transparently reflect the underlying Greek or Hebrew to a greater degree.

Functional equivalence translation aims at best representing the *meaning* of the text as closely as possible with English equivalents. It is especially strong in helping English speakers understand idioms. Where the NKJV says, "gird up the loins of your mind," the meaning comes across much better in the HCSB "with your minds ready for action." Measurements are given in equivalents that we have reference for (e.g., "gallons" instead of "measures") and the form of the English feels more natural. Passages translated in this manner overall communicate the meaning of the text better.

Each approach comes with its own potential pitfalls. The most glaring for the formal equivalence approach can be a tendency toward stilted English. A more literal translation can even lead to a loss of meaning at times. Meaning in translation is contained in more than just the words, and sometimes the meaning may actually be obscured or misunderstood if the text is translated formally. This can be demonstrated by comparing how the NASB and ESV render 1 Corinthians 7:1:

NASB: Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman.

ESV: Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman."

The NASB adopts a formal approach to this passage and renders the Greek euphemism of "not to touch" directly, and thereby runs the risk of suggesting that a man should not have physical contact with a woman. Furthermore, the formatting of the text makes it appear as if Paul directly commends this avoidance of physical contact.[3] In contrast, the ESV adopts a more functional approach which makes clear what was euphemistically expressed in the NASB. Furthermore, enclosing the phrase in quotation marks helps show that this is something that the Corinthians had written about and to which Paul is now responding, rather than commanding.

Functional equivalence, on the other hand, can make it harder to get a feel for the underlying Hebrew and Greek, while the level of the language may feel too conversational for some. It is also overall more interpretive and can sometimes end up overly restricting meaning. We can see how this happens with the NLT's rendering of 1 Timothy 5:22:

NLT: Never be in a hurry about appointing a church leader. Do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure.

NKJV: Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people's sins; keep yourself pure.

The NLT provides an interpretation of what the extent of "laying hands on" means, specifying that it refers to appointing a church leader. This way of rendering the text is perhaps too restrictive, for while it certainly encompasses ordaining and appointing church leaders, it may refer to other contexts where one may be set aside for service, such as being sent out as a missionary. The NKJV presents the text without the additional interpretation, and so does not overly restrict the meaning of the text and has not already made the interpretive decision here for the reader.

Bible translations are often described as formal or functional translations, but as we have mentioned, no translation is truly one or the other. They are best understood as falling along a spectrum of how often they lean one direction or the other. This may be demonstrated by the chart in Figure 16.1. Those translations that are farthest to the left are very formal and take the idea of literal translation to an extreme. Those to the far right of the chart are very free, to the point that these types of translations are commonly called paraphrases. Translations that straddle the line of formal and functional approaches are often called *mediating*

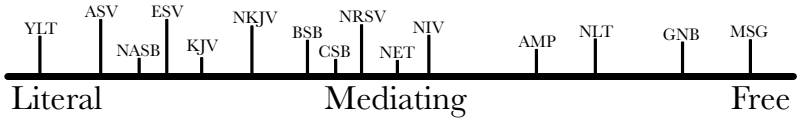


Figure 16.1. A chart of the spectrum of Bible translations

translations. Most translations sit somewhere more to one side or the other without falling into extremes. In every so-called formal translation, you will find translations that are quite functional and vice versa.[4] For example, the ESV's rendering of Psalm 44:14 as "you have made us… a *laughingstock* among the peoples" is less literal than the NIV's "the peoples *shake their heads* at us." Because there are various examples of formal translations being more functional and functional translations being more formal, Dave Brunn has contended that translation philosophies need to be recognized as ideals and not always as the reality. Bible translations have an ideal range for how free or how literal their translations are, but because they often go outside their ideal range, they have a real range that is greater than their ideal may imply.[5] The implication for us is that much of the heat of debates over Bible translation philosophy is often centered on ideals, rather than reality.

The most important takeaway when it comes to translation philosophies is that you should know what translation philosophy is followed in your Bible translation of choice. Are you unsure of what that is? Open up to the beginning of your Bible and read the preface. All modern Bible translations should include a preface describing the translation approach and particular features of note in your translation. If you've never looked at your Bible's preface before, what are you waiting for? I expect it will be an enlightening experience.

Factors in Translation

Having established the two basic schemes on the spectrum of Bible translation, we turn now to some factors that go into translation. I want to acknowledge first of all that Bible translation is, by its very nature, controversial work. Undertaking a new translation or revision of an existing translation is an endeavor that has consistently proved to stir up controversy over the years, all the way back to some of the first translations ever produced. This is well demonstrated by Jerome's initial response to Pope Damasus's request to revise the Latin translation of his day:

> You urge me to revise the old Latin version, and, as it were, to sit in judgment on the copies of the Scriptures which are now scattered throughout the whole world; and, inasmuch as they differ from one another, you would have me decide which of them agree with the Greek original. The labour is one of love, but at the same time both perilous and presumptuous; for in judging others I must be content to be judged by all. … Is there a man, learned or unlearned, who will not, when he takes the volume into his hands, and perceives that what he reads does not suit his settled tastes, break out immediately into violent language, and call me a forger and a profane person for having the audacity to add anything to the ancient books, or to make any changes or corrections therein?[6]

Bible translation can be a thankless job and can easily stir up people's ire if the translation deviates from a norm or if a familiar rendering is altered. Yet this does not mean that the task is impossible. As Glen Scorgie has said, "Bible translators must be modest, but they also must be—if they are Christians—optimistic as well. Meaning can never be transferred between linguistic systems comprehensively (thus the modesty), but it can be transferred truly and substantially (thus the hopefulness)."[7] We tend to take it for granted that we have the Bible in English and in so many different versions, and I'm not sure many of us stop often enough to think about the immense amount of work that goes into transferring meaning from one language to another as faithfully as possible. My end goal of this section is for you to appreciate the work that goes into translation, and perhaps, if you are tempted to do so, to be a little slower to criticize Bible translations for "errors" or "mistranslations."

All Translation is Interpretation

The maxim that should be remembered for this chapter is that a*ll translation is interpretation to one extent or another*. No language has a complete one-to-one equivalence; languages are not codes that can be perfectly mapped onto each other, so some interpretation is always required in order to determine what is the best way to represent the equivalent of a word or phrase from the source language into the receptor language. Something as simple as choosing to translate the Hebrew *arets* as "land" instead of "ground" is a small level of interpretation. There is no escaping the need to interpret. Translators always must interpret their text in order to render a proper translation.

Translation Involves Compromise

There are always some tradeoffs in translation. As Robert Alter has commented, "The practice of translation... entails an endless series of compromises, some of

them happy, some painful and not quite right because the translator has been unable to find an adequate English equivalent for what is happening—often brilliantly—in the original language."[8] This compromise means that "you gain something through the loss of something else."[9] Rendering a translation in a more literal fashion may sacrifice the beauty of the language or it may lose clarity. Striving for natural English may result in the loss of correspondence with the underlying language or of its cultural distinctiveness. Retaining traditional translation phraseology may need to be weighed against a clearer alternative. Different translation approaches and choices result in different tradeoffs. Understanding your Bible translation's general translation philosophy can help you know the type of tradeoffs and compromises that are likely to have been made. And your Bible's footnotes will often alert you to where these occur.

True Literal Translation is Impossible

Probably no other term is so misunderstood and misapplied when talking about Bible translation than the term "literal." Because languages are not codes and all translation involves interpretation, you can almost never translate in a truly "literal" fashion for any great length of time between languages. At some point, translators inevitably need to diverge from the "literal" translation of the words to an English equivalent of what the words and sentences actually mean. We could think of some common expressions in other languages to illustrate. Take the Spanish phrase, "*¿como te llamas?*" We usually say this translates to "what is your name?" This is what the phrase means, but not literally speaking. Literally translated, this would be, "how do you call yourself?" In German, "*Ich habe Hunger*" means "I am hungry," but quite literally is "I have hunger." In French, when we eat a "*petit déjeuner*" in the morning, we are not having a "little lunch," but "breakfast." If we are to translate these idiomatic phrases accurately, we must ask what is the equivalent *meaning* of the whole phrase in English, not simply what the "literal" translation of each word is.

Another reason why truly "literal" translation is impossible is because syntax differs from language to language—that is, they use different word orders. English is a syntactically rigid language, being known as an SVO (Subject-Verb-Object) language. I must start with my subject, then my verb, and then my object; breaking this pattern feels like awkward or foreign English. The sentence "Bob threw a ball" feels very natural, while "Bob a ball threw" or "a ball threw Bob" sounds strange. It is possible and natural in other languages to have a similar kind of syntax to these alternatives. A minor example of a syntactical difference may be seen in Spanish (and many other languages) where the adjective follows rather than precedes the noun. So in Spanish, we would not translate "*la casa roja*" as "the

house red," but as "the red house." Failing to rearrange the word order of the German sentence "*Die Frau, die das Essen aß, war glücklich,*" would result in translating it as "the woman who *the food ate* was happy."[10] But this gets things backwards (and quite disturbing!) because English requires syntactical rearrangement to make sense. Instead, the sentence is correctly translated as, "the woman who *ate the food* was happy." And all of this is not even to mention other difficulties, such as those that come with translating prepositions, which invariably have different functions across languages.

Literal translation in a literal sense is thus never truly done. Even the Bible translations deemed to be the most "literal" do not literally engage in literal translation. Idioms are commonly translated into equivalents and syntax is rearranged. In other words, all translations interpret the text first and then translate into proper English equivalents as best they can. As a *reductio ad absurdum*, if I were to literally translate Matthew 1:18, I would end up with, "The, now, of Jesus Christ the birth thus was: Being betrothed the mother of him, Mary, to Joseph, before the coming together of them she was found in stomach having from Spirit Holy." It has English words but is barely intelligible as English. So just keep in mind that when we speak of literal translation, we very rarely are speaking about truly "literal" translations; too much literalness would get a translation into trouble.

Idioms and Figures of Speech

All languages have idioms. Native idioms rarely sound strange to our ears, but they usually make little sense when we break them down into their constituent parts. We often don't stop to think about idioms in our own language because they are so par for the course. But translating idioms is no piece of cake; in fact, it could sometimes be a pain in the neck. You might be on the fence about whether to translate the idiom word-for-word or use an English idiom that is cut from the same cloth. You could even take some flak for your translation decision. I could talk about idioms until the cows come home, but I don't want to keep beating a dead horse.

Well now that I got that off my chest (ahem), idioms and figures of speech are very much a factor in translation. A choice must be made as to whether to translate the words as they appear in the original language or find an equivalent meaning in English. In Arabic, there is the phrase *ʿaTak ʿamru*, which we can translate literally as "he gave you his life." The meaning, however, is a delicate way of saying someone has died, basically equivalent to the English phrase "he passed away." In the Bible, we could consider Revelation 2:23 in which Jesus is said to be the one who searches "kidneys and hearts" (*nefrous kai kardias*). This Greek idiomatic phrase makes little sense in English, and so translators generally prefer

the English idiomatic equivalent of "hearts and minds." Other idioms might be familiar enough that they need no elaboration and may be rendered directly in the translation, such as the euphemistic use of "to know" throughout the Bible. All languages have idioms and figures of speech, and properly representing them is a unique challenge of translating between languages.

Meaning is Determined by Context

Since translators have to interpret, they often have to translate the same words in multiple ways across different contexts. One of the most notoriously difficult words to pin down is the Greek word *logos*, which, depending on context, is variously translated in the NASB as "word," (John 1:1) "reason" (Matt. 5:32), "teaching" (Heb. 6:1), or "statement" (John 6:60), among many other possible renderings. Words often do not have a single meaning but have what is known as a semantic range—a range of meanings that are determined by context. We intuitively know in our native language when we should understand the meanings of words in different ways. Consider the following sentences:

- *The Red Sox scored a* ***run****.*
- *I went for a* ***run*** *this morning.*
- *She let the chickens out into the* ***run****.*
- *The car had* ***run*** *the red light.*
- *Her nose was* ***running****.*
- *Bob* ***runs*** *his own business.*
- *Tom decided to* ***run*** *for mayor.*
- *There was a* ***run*** *on the bank.*

Now if I asked you what the word "run" meant, what would you say? How you answer would depend upon the context in which I was using the word—and there are many more ways I could use it! To translate these sentences into another language, we would have to use multiple different words to capture all of the possible meanings of "run," just as we must use many words in English to capture the meaning of a word like *logos* depending on its context. The word "run" does not carry all of these different meanings at once, but only that which is contextually determined, just as *logos* only carries its contextually determined meaning at any one time. Sometimes multiple meanings could make sense, and so translators must interpret the text to determine which sense of the words and phrases is intended in context and what English equivalent best captures that nuance.

Different Linguistic Features

It is obvious that Hebrew and Greek are different languages, but for my monolingual readers, how different may not be apparent. Here are some features of Greek and Hebrew that differ from English and must be taken into account when translating:

- English requires the verb "to be" in the present tense, whereas it is largely optional in Greek and Hebrew. The sentence "I a fisherman" is unacceptable English but is perfectly normal in Greek or Hebrew.
- In English we have two articles: an indefinite (a/an) and a definite article (the). Hebrew and Greek, by contrast, both lack an indefinite article and only have the definite article. Furthermore, the article in Greek does not function the same way as "the" in English, such as often going before proper names like "the Peter," nor does Greek always require an article for a noun to be definite.
- Greek is what is known as an inflected language, which means that its nouns take on different forms depending on what role they play in the sentence. English used to be inflected, but only retains remnants of this in its pronouns, such as in "he," "him," or "his." All Greek nouns function in a similar fashion, with the result that Greek word order is very flexible.
- Both Greek and Hebrew clearly specify plural second person pronouns. In English, "you" plays double duty and can be ambiguous at times as to whether a single person or multiple people are being referenced.
- Hebrew has pronouns and verb conjugations specifically for females. Where "they" could be ambiguous in English, Hebrew would be clear as identifying "they" as all females. Where "they went to dinner" would be ambiguous in English, the Hebrew verb would be clear.
- Hebrew and Greek both have words that are not translatable into English, such as the Hebrew direct object marker *et*. It is used in contexts like, "God created *et* the heavens and *et* the earth." Completely meaningless in English, but necessary in Hebrew. By the same token, the English word "do" in questions is meaningless and often cannot be translated into other languages (do you know what I mean?).[11]

There are many other features that we could highlight, but suffice to say that the original languages function differently than English does (why does English use "does" at the end of that sentence? What does it even mean?). Most of these features are relatively easy to adapt into English, but some, such as the Greek genitive case, can prove more difficult than others.

Punctuation and Formatting

Hebrew and Greek had little to no punctuation, thus punctuation in English Bibles is a matter of some level of interpretation. Translations must account for punctuation in a way that makes sense in English while faithfully representing the original languages. We don't truly have the option in good English to completely

disregard punctuation; to do so would be to create a very difficult text to read. For example, Paul is notorious for having very long trains of thought that all would technically be a single sentence. Ephesians 1:3–14 could be understood as a single sentence in Greek, but English does not allow for such long sentences. The ESV breaks it up into four sentences, the NIV breaks it into seven, while the NLT has fifteen. Furthermore, translators sometimes have to choose punctuation at points of ambiguity. In Ephesians 1:4–5, translators must determine where the phrase "in love" should be placed. The NKJV puts "in love" with the final sentence of verse 4. In contrast, the NASB understands "in love" as belonging to what follows in verse 5:

NASB: …[4]just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. *In love* [5]He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will.

NKJV: …[4]just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him *in love*, [5]having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.

Quotation marks must be inserted and ended at appropriate points. Sometimes, it is not always clear where a quotation ends, and so translators differ over where to place the quotation marks. Who spoke the words of John 3:16? Was it Jesus, or was this a comment that John was making about the words of Jesus? Translations such as the ESV include quotations when Jesus starts speaking in verse 10 and punctuate it such that he speaks all the way through to the end of verse 21. By contrast, the translators of the NET understood Jesus's quotation to have ended in verse 15, with verses 16–21 being John's editorial comments about what Jesus has just said. The Greek does not indicate one way or another, but because proper English demands quotation marks, the translators must make an interpretive decision. This same principle applies to red letter Bibles.

Translators must also determine whether or not to capitalize certain words. Greek and Hebrew did not practice capitalization, but since English requires capitalization for proper nouns, translators must make a decision. It makes a difference in our reading of Romans 8:10 whether we read "spirit" (as in the NASB) or "Spirit" (as in the NIV). The practice of some Bible translations to capitalize divine pronouns adds another level of complexity. When Bible translators have pronouns that refer to God, should they refer to "Him" or to "him?" The NASB and NKJV have adopted the capitalization of divine pronouns, and this practice means that they insert a degree of interpretation into the text that was not present as it was originally written in Greek and Hebrew. Psalm 37:23 in the

NASB is a perfect example of capitalizing a pronoun where the referent is ambiguous.[12]

Gender Language

Related to the misunderstood idea of literal translation is the hullabaloo that surrounds the issue of gender-accurate language in Bible translation, alternatively referred to as *gender-neutral* or *inclusive* language. Since controversy erupted in the 1990s over the release of the New International Version Inclusive Language Edition (NIVi) in Great Britain,[13] debate around the topic has been quite heated.[14] Amongst the general Bible-reading public, it is perhaps the most misunderstood aspect and, quite frankly, the most common cause for slander. Why slander? It is not uncommon to hear it suggested that the only real reason for this practice is capitulation to the culture or a shift toward liberalism. As Norman Geisler has claimed, the International Bible Society (ISB) planned a "politically correct 'inclusive language' revision to make the NIV less accurate but more acceptable to feminists."[15] The debate can often be presented in terms of liberal versus conservative, yet it misrepresents what many faithful and conservative scholars would argue for on linguistic grounds. Proponents of gender-accurate translation would contend that the English language has changed over the years, such that retaining masculine language actually makes the Bible more masculine-oriented than the original text implies.[16] It's not a matter of updating language to pacify liberal feminists, but one of accurate translation (and does a linguistic point need to be dismissed simply because a feminist raised it?). Though Greek and Hebrew might have used generic masculine language, it would have been understood to include males and females, whereas the language shift in English might mean some would understand generic masculine language to mean that the text only applies to men.

In reality, all English translations adopt a gender-accurate approach to some extent, even those that are considered to be the most literal.[17] An example of where you might find gender accurate/inclusive language in a formal translation is in passages like Matthew 19:26, where the NASB reads, "with *people* this is impossible," rather than "with *men*." Another example might be Matthew 5:22, where the CSB reads, "I tell you, everyone who is angry with his *brother or sister* will be subject to judgment." The translators have taken the generic "brother" and clarified that it includes both men and women, since women are not excluded from liability. The ESV takes a more consciously generic masculine approach, yet still footnotes generic references to "brothers" with the alternate translation "or brothers and sisters," clarifying that context determines whether only brothers or both brothers and sisters are in view. Even with the ESV's consciously generic masculine approach, we find places within it as well where it has adopted a gen-

der-accurate readings, such as when it consistently refers to the "*people* of Israel" instead of the "*sons* of Israel."[18] And this is not a recent phenomenon; as D. A. Carson notes, "the KJV renders the Hebrew word *ben* (or its plural *benim*) as 'son' or 'sons' 2,822 times and as 'child' or 'children' 1,533 times, or about 35 percent."[19] Whether it is best to translate in an inclusive manner is another matter of interpretation for translators which they must make on a case by case basis. The question is ultimately whether they are best reflecting the intent and meaning of the text, not merely the "literal" rendering.

There Is No Such Thing as a Single Correct Translation

The last point I want to make is that, due to the various elements that go into translation, no single translation is perfect; no single translation is the "right" one. Since translation is more of an art than a science, translators can offer multiple valid ways to render a passage in English. Sometimes there are different ways to present idioms, often there are alternative word choices, or perhaps the text could be rearranged to make the English more natural. If you have experience reading multiple Bible translations, this is likely intuitive for you, though it is often helpful to provide specific examples. We could look at John 2:4 with a comparison between my own more literal translation, and those of three other popular evangelical Bible translations:

Mine: And Jesus said to her, "What to me and to you, woman? My hour has not yet come."

ESV: And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come."

CSB: "What has this concern of yours to do with me, woman?" Jesus asked. "My hour has not yet come."

NIV: "Woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My hour has not yet come."

Which one is correct? Technically, all of the translations are correct, although each one is aiming at a slightly different goal. My translation aims to give you an idea of how the Greek reads without much regard for a solid English equivalent, while the ESV, CSB, and NIV all aim to communicate what "what to me and to you" would actually mean in English idiom. The ESV does this while trying to retain more of the overall form of the underlying text, while the CSB and NIV each put it into more natural English.

Are there times when we can say one translation better renders the meaning of a text than another translation? Sure, but only rarely does that mean that a text was *mistranslated*. A translation may be weaker, but to say something was mistranslated is to impute direct error on the part of the translators, something that is a

rare occurrence. Even if you do not understand why a translation took a certain direction, there is almost always a reason for why it was done. Even weaker translations, such as my own in John 2:4, are technically correct ways of rendering the text. The greater question of whether a translation is correct is whether it succeeds in achieving the communication goal it was aiming at.

An Example of Translation in Action

If you have never translated anything before, it might be helpful to have a demonstration of the process and some of the decisions that have to be made. To that end, I will walk you through the translation of 1 John 3:17. If a step-by-step breakdown of the translation process is not your cup of tea, you may skip to the next section without missing anything significant. The transliterated Greek text of 1 John 3:17 is as follows:

> *hos d' an echē ton bion tou kosmou kai theōrē ton adelphon autou chreian echonta kai kleisē ta splanchna autou ap' autou, pos hē agapē tou theou menei en autō?*[20]

hos d' an echē. The second word of the sentence—*d'*, an abbreviated form of *de*—is what is known as a *postpositive*, which means that though it is second in the sentence, it is a conjunction that needs to be placed first in translation. This word is often translated as "but."

> But...

hos ~~d'~~ an echē. The word *hos* is a masculine singular relative pronoun and I translate it as "one" in this case. The word *an* I skip in my translation because it is a particle used to express conditionality or potentiality and is often untranslatable in English. The word *echē* is a singular third-person present active subjunctive verb that means "he has." The subjunctive verb indicates that this passage is speaking of a hypothetical potential situation. Here, I simply translate *echē* as "has" to correspond to "one." Since a potential situation is expressed, I add an "if" to the sentence to bring out the nuance of the particle *an* and the subjunctive tense of the verb.

> But if one has...

~~echē~~ ton bion tou kosmou. The article *ton* is paired with *bion*, which is the accusative form of the word *bios* (the accusative case means it is the object of the verb). The standard Greek lexicon known as BDAG provides two basic senses for *bios*: "life and activity associated w. it, *life*," and "resources needed to maintain life, *means of subsistence*."[21] To determine the correct sense, we need to take into account *tou kosmou*, which is in the genitive case and here means "of the world." The first sense of *bion* does not fit in this context, so it is something under the second sense.

When I consider the full context of the verse, I decide to try to maintain close correspondence with the underlying Greek and choose to translate the whole phrase as "the goods of the world."

> But if one has the goods of the world...

~~tou kosmou~~ kai theōrē ton adelphon autou. The word *kai* is a conjunction and may be translated simply as "and" here. The verb *theōrē* is also a singular third-person present active subjunctive in keeping with the hypothetical scenario. It can be translated along the lines of "observe," "see," or "notice." The phrase *ton adelphon autou* is the object of the verb, so he sees "his brother." In my translation, I drop the article *ton* because the literal "the brother of him" is poor English and we do not require an article in this context. The word *adelphos* can be used as a generic term but I choose to maintain basic correspondence with the Greek and translate this as "and sees his brother." I add a footnote to clarify that the passage is not only referring to males.

> But if one has the goods of the world and sees his brother[1]...

~~ton adelphon autou~~ chreian echonta. The word *chreian* is a word denoting a "lack" or a "need," while *echonta* is a participle that means "having." I cannot translate the phrase as "his brother a need having" since this is poor English, so I change my word order to "his brother having a need." This is still awkward English and is not quite strong enough, but we happen to have a good idiomatic English equivalent: "in need." Someone "sees his brother in need."

> But if one has the goods of the world and sees his brother[1] in need...

~~chreian echonta~~ kai kleisē ta splanchna autou ap' autou. I previously translated *kai* as "and," but the clause that follows stands in contrast from what comes before. Rather than a basic "and," I choose to use "yet" to highlight the disjunction that is seen in this clause. The word *kleisē* is a singular third-person present aorist subjunctive verb and can mean "shut," "close," or "lock," among other similar ideas, depending on the context. What the person is shutting is *ta splanchna autou*, literally meaning "his bowels," "intestines," or "entrails." The article *ta* is skipped as unnecessary in my translation. He is shutting his bowels *ap' autou*, "against him" (his brother). This is an idiomatic expression in Greek that cannot be brought into English without sounding awkward. I choose to use a similar English idiom of "close his heart," so the phrase becomes "and closes his heart against him."

> But if one has the goods of the world and sees his brother[1] in need yet closes his heart against him...

~~ap' autou~~, pos hē agapē tou theou menei en autō. A question naturally follows if one is shutting his heart against his brother in need: *pos,* "how?" The word *hē* is a feminine article we can translate as "the," and *agapē* is best translated as "love." The kind of love is *tou theou,* "of God." Thus, " the love of God" or "God's love." I again omit the article *tou* since the article in Greek functions differently than English articles and the phrase "the love of the God" miscommunicates the intent of the Greek. The verb *menei* has various meanings depending on context, such as "dwell," "remain," "stay," "persist," or "await," among other possible senses. Given that God's love *menei* "in him" (*en autō*), the sense that is being communicated by *menei* is God's love remaining present in someone. Because "dwell" is an English term that captures continual presence well, I choose to use it to render *menei*. To make the sentence proper English, I must also provide the word "does" though there is no single Greek equivalent to it: "how does the love of God dwell in him?" If I were to approach the translation in a freer and more interpretive fashion, I might suggest that the phrase "how could the love of God be said to be in him?" captures the type of tone and connotation—if not the wording—that John is communicating to his audience. I decide to try to bring this connotation out by adding "then" as an intensifier and changing "does" to "can" in my final translation.

> But if one has the goods of the world and sees his brother[1] in need yet closes his heart against him, how then can the love of God dwell in him?

Translating a single verse such as 1 John 3:17 does not take that long in reality; many of these decisions are instinctive based on a knowledge of Greek. There is not really any question of whether to translate something as "his brother" instead of the awkward-yet-more-literal "the brother of him" or to drop an article when it would not make sense in English. But there are still questions that can be raised and trade-offs that must be weighed when we think about the details. Does "goods of the world" capture what John meant well enough? Is "dwell" the proper word to use in this context? Am I capturing the force of John's question or did I make it too forceful? Not only that, but am I translating this verse appropriately in light of the immediate and broader context of 1 John? When translators translate the Bible, they are not trying to just produce a rough translation, but they are rather trying to produce a fine-tuned translation, one that captures the words, intent, tone, and connotations of the text. And translators will often differ in very slight ways as to how best to accomplish that goal.

Can We Trust Translations as the Word of God?

With all this talk about translation being interpretation and there being multiple correct ways to translate the Bible, how could we ever call the Bible in English the Word of God? Some respond to this problem by rallying behind a single translation—almost always the KJV—and lifting that single translation up as *the* Word of God in English; all other translations are thus distortions or deviations from the Word of God. Some may respond like Bart Ehrman and conclude that most people do not truly have access to the Word of God if they must read it in translation:

> If the full meaning of the words of scripture can be grasped only by studying them in Greek (and Hebrew), doesn't this mean that most Christians, who don't read ancient languages, will never have complete access to what God wants them to know? And doesn't this make the doctrine of inspiration a doctrine only for the scholarly elite, who have the intellectual skills and leisure to learn the languages and study the texts by reading them in the original? What good does it do to say that the words are inspired by God if most people have absolutely no access to these words, but only to more or less clumsy renderings of these words into a language, such as English, that has nothing to do with the original words?[22]

The response to the notion that the malleability of translation means that we do not have the Word of God in English is similar to how we answer objections to differences in the manuscripts: there is micro-level variation, but macro-level agreement in the translations. Sure, you could get hung up if you demand word-level perfection of Bible translations and cannot tolerate any variation. But simply compare the big picture; read long passages and see if the overall message changes. The reality is it does not. The vast majority of Christians who have ever lived have read the Bible in translation. Even the apostles often used a translation—the LXX—when quoting from the Old Testament and the earliest Gentile Christians only ever heard the Old Testament in translation. This is not the mention the early translations of the Bible into Latin, Syriac, and Coptic, among other languages. Reading the Word of God in translation is the common experience of most Christians who have ever lived. I affirm with the translators of the KJV "that the very meanest [poorest] translation of the Bible in English… containeth the Word of God, nay, is the Word of God."[23] How can I say a translation *is* the Word of God? Because insofar as a translation accurately conveys the meaning of the source text, it conveys God's words. If the words of a king are translated into another language, they remain the words of the king and carry the same authority regardless of the language.[24] So too with translations of the Scriptures, for they

possess a derivative authority[25] as a translation of the words of God as originally written in the original languages. Translations may not be *the Bible* in an ultimate sense, but they carry forward the authority of God's words from the original languages and can truly be said to be God's words to us.

That the Bible in English not only *contains* the Word of God but *is* the Word of God is a primary reason why we should not think of the original languages as holding the keys to secret insights. What does the Bible say in the original languages? In most cases, exactly what the original languages say, whether that be in a formally equivalent way or in a functionally equivalent way. The meaning remains. While appeal to the original languages must be the final arbiter in questions about interpretation—particularly since languages change over time and translations also must change with them—English is a perfectly viable vehicle for communicating the message that God has given to his prophets and apostles to be handed down to us.

Conclusion

Bible translation is far more an art than a science, and so translators guided by different philosophies will reach slightly different conclusions over how to best render a passage. It is also a difficult and controversial task. Translators must weigh a whole host of factors in translating the Bible, ranging from grammatical aspects, to word choices, to punctuation, to cultural context, to the translation tradition that has come before, and much more. Though these many aspects mean that translators render passages slightly differently, we can readily affirm that they are communicating the same message. And because the message is faithfully communicated in English, we can affirm that we do indeed have the Word of God in our own language. The next time you are reading your Bible translation of choice, stop and think for a moment about all the work that went into producing it, and then thank God for the work of the scholars that he has used over the years to make the Bible accessible to us in our own language.

Further Reading

Brunn, Dave. *One Bible Many Versions: Are All Translations Created Equal?* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013.

Fee, Gordon D. and Mark L. Strauss. *How to Choose a Translation for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding and Using Bible Versions.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007.

17.
Differences in English Bible Translations

If you have ever been to a Bible study, you have likely run across someone who was using a different Bible translation than you. You may have even wondered why it is that their translation differed so much. I hope the previous chapter helped answer the why. But is having multiple translations really a gain? Wouldn't it be better to have a single common translation? We might be tempted to think that our current state of affairs with a multiplicity of translations circulating is lamentable, yet having Bible translations across the translation philosophy spectrum is actually a great gift to the church. If you go back about 150 years, you would have only had recourse to a single Bible translation—the KJV. In the present, we have many Bible translations that have all approached the task of translation slightly differently. Something is always lost in translation, so it can be difficult to catch all the nuances from a single translation, but having multiple translations helps lessen what is lost. If you only speak English (as I expect most people reading this book do), I would urge you to consciously choose to use multiple translations across the translation spectrum. Maybe you want to get a good representation of the words underlying the text; consult a formal translation like the NASB. Maybe you would like a better sense of the meaning of the text; open up a functional translation like the NIV or the NLT. Rather than seeing differing Bible translations as competitors, it is better to view them as complements. In this chapter, we will look at how translations differ and how they can complement each other. Two

translations are better than one; where one translation stumbles, another can help lift it up.

Different Translation Approaches

To illustrate how varying translation approaches can result in slightly different translations, I will highlight passages taken from a cross section of three translations at a time. The first translation will be what I deem to be the most literal (formal) translation, while the last translation will be the freest. The middle translation will be a mix between being a mediating translation or one that roughly corresponds with either the first or the last translation. We want to remember that though we can generally classify some translations as more literal or more free, sometimes the generally more literal translations will approach specific passages more freely than do the generally freer translations.

Proverbs 22:28

KJV: Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set.

NASB: Do not move the ancient boundary Which your fathers have set.

NET: Do not move an ancient boundary stone that was put in place by your ancestors.

The NET takes a slightly more functional approach, adding in the word "stone" to clarify what was used to set the boundary and using the word "ancestors" to clarify that "fathers" means more than just direct parentage. The KJV and NASB are roughly equal in terms of being good formal representations of the underlying Hebrew, albeit in English from different time periods.

I chose this passage to address what are known as "false friends."[1] That is, words that you think you know but you don't actually know. They are often highlighted when learning other languages, such as *journeé* in French meaning "day" rather than "journey" as you might expect. The language of the KJV is an older form of English than what we speak today. The English language has morphed over time and meanings have changed, causing false friends to exist in the KJV. When we look at the two translations, we should ask, do "remove" and "move" have different meanings? In our contemporary English, yes. If I *move* something, I simply change its location, perhaps even a small amount, but if I *remove* something, I have taken it away completely. Yet there is no difference here; the meaning of "remove" during the time of the KJV had the exact same meaning as "move." The meaning of "remove" has morphed over the years, becoming more specific in contemporary English. Thus "remove" is a false friend because our contemporary understanding of "remove" makes perfect sense, but we are understanding the meaning incorrectly and may not even know it. This sort of

language change resulting in false friends—words you don't know you don't know—is what makes modern Bible translations necessary. By consulting these other translations, what might be misunderstood in the KJV is now clarified.

Colossians 1:15

ASV: …who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation…

NKJV: He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation…

NLT: Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation…

The ASV follows the syntax of the Greek, which actually begins its sentence back in verse 9. The Son was referred to in verse 13, and the relative pronoun "who" refers back to him. The NKJV makes the sentence easier for English readers by beginning a new sentence at verse 15 and converting the relative pronoun "who" to "He." It also clarifies the meaning of the preposition in that the Son is the firstborn *over* creation. The NLT takes the freest approach, making it explicit that the passage is talking about Christ and translating very freely the meaning that is contained in the phrase "firstborn of all creation."

Acts 22:16

ESV: And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.

NKJV: And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.

NLT: What are you waiting for? Get up and be baptized. Have your sins washed away by calling on the name of the Lord.

This passage makes for an interesting conjunction between textual and translational differences. The phrase "name of the Lord" instead of "his name" is a textual difference between the ESV and NKJV. But, as far as I can tell, there is not a textual difference between the ESV and NLT since both translate from the critical text of the NA/UBS. It seems that the freer translation policy of the NLT resulted in the same type of clarifying change that occurred in the Greek Textus Receptus which the NKJV translated from.

Exodus 27:1

KJV: And thou shalt make an altar of shittim wood, five cubits long, and five cubits broad; the altar shall be foursquare: and the height thereof shall be three cubits.

NASB: Now you shall make the altar of acacia wood, five cubits long and five cubits wide; the altar shall be square, and its height shall be three cubits.

CSB: You are to construct the altar of acacia wood. The altar must be square, 7½ feet long, and 7½ feet wide; it must be 4½ feet high.

The KJV remains closest to the syntax of the underlying Hebrew by beginning the sentence with "and," but the translators did not translate the exact type of wood and instead transliterated the Hebrew *shittim* straight into the translation. The NASB and CSB both chose to translate the type of wood as "acacia wood" rather than giving only a transliteration.

The CSB follows a more functional approach by giving measurement equivalents that Americans will readily understand, rather than translating the cubit measurements which most of us have little reference for. Though the NASB keeps cubits in the main body of the text, it also includes footnotes giving the modern equivalents as an aid to the reader.

Psalm 1:1

RSV: Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers.

CSB: How happy is the one who does not walk in the advice of the wicked or stand in the pathway with sinners or sit in the company of mockers!

NET: How blessed is the one who does not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand in the pathway with sinners, or sit in the assembly of scoffers.

The RSV presents a translation of the verse that is closely related to the KJV tradition. What we see in the CSB is a perfectly acceptable alternative, where "blessed" is replaced by "happy," a possible alternate meaning for the Hebrew *ashray*. The CSB and NET also both generalize "man" to "one," preferring a more gender-neutral approach that does not imply that the blessing only applies to males. Where the RSV shows that "man" is how the phrase was spoken in Hebrew, the generic "one" shows that the text should be understood as applying to all equally.

John 3:16

NKJV: For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

ESV: For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

NLT: For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

Every single translation is at roughly the same level of formal equivalence translation at this point; the NLT is only slightly freer in its more expressive addition of "one and only." The NKJV reflects a translation that understands the Greek *monogenes* as "only begotten," while the ESV and NLT reflect more recent linguistic arguments that it is better understood as "only" or "unique." The NKJV and ESV (and most other major English translations) follow the traditional rendering of "God *so loved*," which in some respects may be the retention of what is now a false friend in English. "So" in this context does not mean "so much," but is rather a rendering of the Greek *houtos*, meaning something more along the lines of "in this way." The NLT is clearer in contemporary English as to what the underlying Greek is at this point.[2] Many translations are influenced by traditionalism due to hesitance in overly altering familiar passages, and this is one of those points where traditionalism wins out in many versions. This traditionalism can be supplemented and clarified by a less traditional translation like the NLT.

Genesis 6:4

ESV: The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of man and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men who were of old, the men of renown.

NIV: The Nephilim were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of God went to the daughters of humans and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown.

KJV: There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown.

The ESV and NIV take no stance on what Nephilim means, but simply transliterate the word from Hebrew. Nephilim is a plural word from the Hebrew *nephal*, which means to fall, so it could be understood to refer to "fallen ones," though they take the path of least resistance and leave interpretive options open. The KJV is the most interpretive at this point, translating the word as "giants," and in so doing follows the translation tradition that went back to the LXX.

We should also note the three ways that "daughters of man" is translated. The ESV bears the closest relation to the Hebrew, which uses a singular word (*adam*), but may be understood as a collective singular, hence the KJV's "daughters of men." The NIV prefers to understand this collective in terms of "daughters of humans," since daughters obviously come from more than just men, and so they preferred a broader term.

Examples of Poor Translation and Mistranslation

I do not want to give the impression that any translation goes or that all translations are correct. There are in fact poor translations and mistranslations that exist. I will not spend any great time on them, but I will give three examples of translations that I would qualify as either poorly rendered or outright mistranslations.

Hebrews 2:6–8

ESV: It has been testified somewhere, "What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him? You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, putting everything in subjection under his feet." Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him.

NRSV: But someone has testified somewhere,"What are humans that you are mindful of them or mortals that you care for them? You have made them for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned them with glory and honor, subjecting all things under their feet." Now in subjecting all things to them, God left nothing outside their control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to them.

The approach of the NRSV is to blunt what the author of Hebrews is doing in quoting Psalm 8, which is highlighting the status of Jesus being made a little lower than the angels for a time. While both the Greek (and original Hebrew) for the Psalm certainly can be understood as a collective singular, the author of Hebrews is making a specific point based upon its singular nature. Thus choosing an inclusive and collective translation at this point in the NRSV alters how the author

is using the citation and does not adequately get the full meaning across. It is not quite a mistranslation, but it is the wrong translation choice given the context.

John 1:1

KJV: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

NWT: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god.

The New World Translation (NWT) is the translation prepared by and used by Jehovah's Witnesses, and as such is considered a sectarian translation. It is labeled sectarian because, at certain places, such as here in John 1:1, it intentionally mistranslates passages so as to support its own peculiar doctrines. Here, the correct rendering of "the Word was God" is changed to "the Word was *a* god" to support the Jehovah's Witnesses' modern-day Arian doctrine that Christ is a created being, a lesser god. It goes against a basic rule of Greek grammar known as the predicate-nominative and no other English translation agrees with its rendering. If a single translation stands alone in a significant way against all others, this is a good sign that something uncouth may be taking place.

Ephesians 3:20–21

BSB: Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

TPT: *Never doubt* God's mighty power to work in you and accomplish all this. He will achieve infinitely more than your greatest request, your most unbelievable dream, and exceed your wildest imagination! He will outdo them all, for his miraculous power constantly energizes you. Now we offer up to God all the glorious praise that rises from every church in every generation through Jesus Christ—and all that will yet be manifest through time and eternity. Amen!

The Passion Translation is a newcomer on the Bible translation scene, having been translated by one man, Brian Simmons. The Passion Translation is, on the whole, a very free translation, and one that has strong sectarian tendencies. The main issue with it is that it has been marketed as a faithful translation that is useful for Bible study and does not acknowledge its very free and interpretive nature. It claims to be "an *essential equivalence* translation" and says it "maintains the essential form and essential function of the original words."[3] Yet here in Ephesians 3:20–21, a theological interpretation is inserted rather than a translation, to the extent that I would be willing to call this a mistranslation. In what is a doxology as

originally written, Simmons has placed an exhortation that accords with his signs and wonders theology; the additions are not even hinted at in the Greek. I would never recommend The Passion Translation due to its sectarian nature and many translation issues, but if it is to be consulted, it should be approached more as translation mixed with commentary or as a paraphrase. In other words, approach it as you would The Message Bible.

Conclusion

Having so many Bible translations means that we do not have a single standard and that there are thousands of slight differences between our Bible translations. Yet this is not a net negative, but a net positive. Because translation is difficult and it can be hard to capture all nuances in translation, using multiple translations helps fill in those gaps. Some will give you better access to the underlying text, while others will better clarify the meaning. If you've never taken the time to consult multiple translations, go ahead and try it as you study the Bible. You might find it to be an edifying experience.

Further Reading

Ward, Mark. *Authorized: The Use and Misuse of the King James Bible*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018.

Wildsmith, Tim. *Bible Translations for Everyone: A Guide to Finding a Bible That's Right for You.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Reflective, 2024.

18.
Early English Bible Translations

When we think of early English Bible translations, the first translation that comes to mind is probably the King James Version, and rightfully so. It functioned as the only Bible for the English-speaking world for over 200 years, and it still continues to serve many Bible readers down to the present. Yet the KJV is the culmination of the history of nearly a hundred years of early modern English Bible translation, rather than its beginning. The earliest days of bringing the Bible into English are full of intrigue, martyrdom, and controversy. And in the midst of these chaotic times came multiple Bible translations into the English language.

Two themes persist in the history of English Bible translations. First, translation is constantly met with controversy and opposition. New translations were almost always deficient in the eyes of some, and particularly in the earliest days, certain translations were seen as both theologically and politically dangerous. Second is the theme that Bible translation builds upon what comes before. Each successive translation is influenced in some way by earlier translations, and this continues down to the present. The history of the earliest Bibles in English shows us that the translations we read now do not arise in a vacuum, but they in fact stand upon the shoulders of the giants who came before.

Before the King James Version

John Wycliffe and the Wycliffe Bible (1380–1395)

The history of the Bible in English does not find its true beginning in the Wycliffe Bible, but English Bible translations as we now know them find their most definite beginning with this translation. Prior to the fourteenth century, some small parts of Scripture had been translated into Old English. These would include Bede's (perhaps incomplete) translation of the Gospel of John around 735 and the partial Old Testament translations that occurred under Alfred in the late ninth century.[1] Yet the Bible was never translated in whole and these translations had little enduring impact. The first complete Bible to be translated into the English language is remembered as being the result of the teachings of John Wycliffe (c. 1328 – 1384). Wycliffe himself likely did not translate the English Bible that bears his name, but his influence leading to the work of translation is so strong that the translation is indeed rightly remembered under his name.

The life and career of Wycliffe spanned a turbulent time for the church. From 1309 to 1377, the papacy was located in Avignon, France, rather than in Rome, during a period often remembered as the Babylonian Captivity of the Papacy. The end of the Avignon papacy brought about another crisis for the Western Church, remembered as the Great Schism. Pope Gregory XI returned the papacy to Rome in 1377, but he died the year after. Under pressure from the local Italian population, the cardinals elected an Italian pope, Urban VI. Several months after Urban VI's election, twelve of the sixteen cardinals determined that Urban's election was not legitimate due to the pressure, and they instead selected a Frenchman as another pope, Clement VII. From 1378 until 1417, there would be two rival popes: one in Avignon and one in Rome. The entire period was one of the most sustained periods of decay and corruption in the hierarchy of the church.

In the face of this decay, Wycliffe arose as a voice against the corruption. He took issue with papal authority in *On Divine Dominion*, promoted England's national interests against Rome in *On Civil Dominion*, and developed a doctrine of Scripture in *On the Truth of Sacred Scripture*. In each of these ways, he became a forerunner of the ideals of the Reformation more than a hundred years before Martin Luther. Most significant for the history of the Bible in English was his emphasis upon the authority of Scripture.[2] Because God was the author of Scripture, its authority was supreme; as he argued, "since the entirety of Holy Scripture is the word of the Lord, no testimony could possibly be better, more certain, or more efficacious."[3] As the very words of God, the authority of Scripture thus stood above all other authorities—popes and their decrees included—so that "those who compose many decrees and decretal letters should never presume that they are of equal

authority with the words of the Lord."[4] One of the impacts of this emphasis on Scripture was the recognition of the need for it to be translated into the language of the people. Wycliffe defended this need for translation by arguing,

> It seems first that the knowledge of God's law should be taught in that language which is best known, because this knowledge is God's Word. ... Thus God's knowledge is Holy Scripture that may in no wise be false. Also the Holy Spirit gave to the apostles at Pentecost knowledge to know all manner of languages to teach the people God's law thereby; and so God willed that the people be taught his law in diverse tongues. But what man on God's behalf should reverse God's ordinance and his will? ... Thus Christ and his apostles taught the people in that tongue that was best known to them. Why should men not do so now? ... In England the friars have taught the Lord's Prayer in the English language. ... Since the Lord's Prayer is part of Matthew's Gospel, as clerks know, why may not all of the Gospel be turned into English as is this part? This is especially so since all Christian men, learned and ignorant, who should be saved might always follow Christ and know his teaching and his life. But the common people of England know it best in their mother tongue and thus it is the same thing to prevent such knowledge of the Gospel and to prevent Englishmen from following Christ and coming to heaven.[5]

This line of argumentation is what led Wycliffe's friends and colleagues to produce a translation of the Bible into English. They translated it from the Latin Vulgate, meaning the first complete English translation was a translation of a translation. We are not quite sure who was the translator or precisely when the first edition was completed, but it was finished between 1380 and 1384. The first edition is significant for being the first complete Bible to ever be translated into English, but its overall English quality was poor, being too literal and too slavishly following the Latin. Around 1395 a second edition appeared, having been revised by John Purvey. This revision was of a higher quality, being written in far more natural English, and it is the version that is best remembered under the name of the "Wycliffe Bible." You may find a comparison of the versions in Figure 18.1.

The Wycliffe Bible's impact on the history of English Bible translation is not found in its words. The language used was an earlier form of English (Middle English), and it was based upon the Latin rather than the original languages. Where the Wycliffe Bible's impact is felt is in the very notion of Bible translation. It was popular with the English-speaking people and served to whet their appetite for the later English Bibles. In the words of one contemporary critic, the result of Wycliffe's translation was that "what was previously known only by learned clerics and those of good understanding has become common, and available to the

1388 Wycliffe Bible	1395 Wycliffe Bible
Manyfold and many maners sum tyme God spekinge to fadris in prophetis, at the laste in thes daies spak to us in the sone: whom he ordeynede eyr of alle thingis, by whom he made and the worldis. The which whanne he is the schynynge of glorie and figure of his substaunce, and berynge alle thingis bi word of his vertu, makyng purgacioun of synnes, sittith on the righthalf of mageste in high thingis; so moche maad betere than aungelis, by how moche he hath inherited a more different, or excellent, name bifore hem.	God, that spak sum tyme bi prophetis in many maneres to oure fadris, at the laste in these daies he hath spoke to vs bi the sone; whom he hath ordeyned eir of alle thingis, and bi whom he made the worldis. Which whanne also he is the brightnesse of glorie, and figure of his substaunce, and berith alle thingis bi word of his vertu, he makith purgacioun of synnes, and syttith on the right-half of the maieste in heuenes; and so myche is maad betere than aungels, bi hou myche he hath eneritid a more dyuerse name bifor hem.

Figure 18.1. A comparison of Hebrews 1:1–4 showing the difference accomplished by the 1395 revision of John Purvey.

laity—in fact, even to women who can read."[6] This was not intended as a compliment. The Wycliffe Bibles would be spread by his followers, known as the Lollards. But, due to Wycliffe's views and those of his followers, the translation was not well received by the powers that be. In 1408, Archbishop Thomas Arundel pronounced,

> Moreover it is a perilous thing, as the Blessed Jerome testifies, to translate the text of Holy Scripture from one idiom into another, inasmuch as in the translations themselves it is no easy matter to keep the same meaning in all cases. ... We therefore enact and ordain that no one henceforth on his own authority translate any text of Holy Scripture into the English or other language, by way of a book, pamphlet, or tract, and that no book, pamphlet, or tract of this kind be read, either already recently composed in the time of the said John Wyclif… under pain of the greater excommunication, until the translation itself shall have been approved by the diocesan of the place or if need be by a provincial council. Whoever shall do the contrary to be punished in like manner as a supporter of heresy and error.[7]

The legacy of Wycliffe meant that the English-speaking public was primed for vernacular translations, but it also meant that any translation into the English language was going to be inherently controversial and even subversive. The

Wycliffe Bible is the first in the line of complete English Bibles, and it is first in the line of controversies that have surrounded English Bibles.

William Tyndale's Translation (1526)

John Wycliffe may be credited with inspiring the first complete English translation of the Bible, but pride of place in the history of the English Bible must go to William Tyndale (c. 1494–1535). A gifted linguist with proficiency in seven languages apart from his native English,[8] Tyndale might truly be called the father of the English Bible. He was the first person to translate the New Testament into English based on the Greek, and the first to translate parts of the Old Testament from the Hebrew. Furthermore, his translation has had an enduring influence—though we may be largely unaware of it—and it has impacted most subsequent major English translations.

Tyndale, born around the year 1494, proved himself to be linguistically gifted from a young age, being able to "read Latin with ease" by the age of ten.[9] This giftedness led to him attending Oxford at the age of twelve, graduating with his Bachelor of Arts in 1512, and then receiving his Master of Arts in 1515. From Oxford, Tyndale likely moved on to study at Cambridge until 1522, where the influence of Erasmus upon the study of Greek was very much alive. As Tyndale was coming of age and honing his scholarly pursuits, momentous goings-on were afoot: Erasmus helped revitalize interest and scholarship in Greek with his publication of the Greek New Testament in 1516, Martin Luther (unwittingly) began the Reformation in Germany in 1517, the Swiss Reformation under Ulrich Zwingli was in full swing by 1522, and Luther later published his German translation of the New Testament that same year. At some point during this upheaval, Tyndale embraced the ideals of the Reformation and came to the conviction that the Bible should be translated into the language of the common people. This conviction is best captured in his famous quotation preserved by John Foxe:

> Soon after, Master Tyndall happened to be in the company of a learned man, and in communing and disputing with him drove him to that issue, that the learned man said: "We were better be without God's law than the Pope's." Master Tyndall, hearing that, answered him: "I defy the Pope and all his laws"; and said: "If God spare my life ere many years, I will cause a boy that driveth the plow, shall know more of the Scripture than thou dost."[10]

The Bible, in Tyndale's estimation, should be available to everyone, even the lowly plowboy. It should be available to every ordinary man and woman on the street, so that the common people could read and learn the Scriptures themselves. Luther had recently given the German people the Bible in their own language,

and Tyndale desired to do the same. In 1523, he sought an appointment from Cuthbert Tunstall (1474–1559), the Bishop of London, to translate the Scriptures into English, but Tunstall turned him down and tried to discourage him from pursuing the project. Tyndale instead found a willing patron in the cloth-merchant Sir Humphrey Monmouth, who allowed Tyndale to stay in his house for six months where he began the work of translation. The work in England would be short-lived, as Tyndale soon was forced to leave England if he was to continue translating; as he put it in his own words in his 1530 preface to the Pentateuch, he came to understand "at the last not only that there was no room in my lord of London's palace to translate the New Testament, but also that there was no place to do it in all England, as experience doth now openly declare."[11] In spring of 1524, Tyndale left England for the continent, never again to return to his home country.

Tyndale conducted his translation work on the New Testament in exile in Germany, working from Erasmus's third edition (1522) of the printed Greek New Testament. The New Testament was completed in 1525 and Tyndale entrusted the work of printing to Peter Quentell in Cologne, Germany. The first attempt at printing very nearly ended in disaster. The city authorities put a stop to Quentell's printing and attempted to seize the translation materials, but Tyndale became aware and was able to escape up the Rhine to Worms (Germany) with some of his materials intact. A second attempt at printing was completed in 1526 by the printer Peter Schöffer, and copies were presently being smuggled into England. Forays into translating the Old Testament soon followed, with a translation of the Pentateuch published in 1530 and Jonah in 1531. These were the first translations of the Old Testament into English from the original Hebrew. Not content with the overall quality of his first translation of the New Testament, Tyndale issued revisions improving upon his translation in 1534 and 1535, the last of which would be the most enduring.

Translation is an inherently controversial matter, and Tyndale's translation was especially so, not only theologically but also politically. Rather than using the familiar English ecclesiastical terms, he exchanged others that had different implications. Rather than "church," he translated "congregation"; "senior" (and later "elder") instead of "priest"; "repent" in place of "do penance"; "love" rather than "charity."[12] In each of these instances, Tyndale struck at aspects of the theology of the day and opened up new ways of understanding the text. His translation decisions raised the ire of various churchmen in England, most notably Thomas More. More charged "there is a false English translation of the New Testament newly forged by Tyndale, so altered and changed in matters of great weight." These changes were such that More considered that the translation "was not

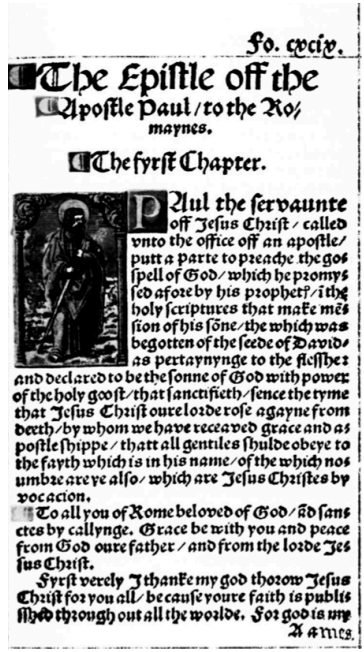
worthy to be called Christ's testament, but either Tyndale's own testament, or the testament of his master Antichrist."[13] The translation, as well as Tyndale's other writings, made him a hunted man for the remainder of his life.

It is hard to overestimate how influential William Tyndale has been, not only on the history of English Bible translations but also on the English language itself. He is credited with introducing to English or popularizing various words we take for granted as part of our theological vocabulary, such as "Passover," "atonement," "judgment seat," and "Jehovah."[14] He is responsible for the familiar biblical turns of phrase, such as "let there be light" (Gen 1:3), "my brother's keeper" (Gen. 4:9), "there were shepherds in the field abiding" (Luke 2:8), or "fight the good fight" (1 Tim. 6:16). Many words and phrases that we are accustomed to as part of the language of the Bible were first introduced to English by Tyndale, to the point that his translation work laid the foundation for all subsequent early English Bible translations, as well as many modern ones. It has been estimated that about 80–90% of Tyndale's words are preserved in the King James Version (KJV), the single most influential Bible in the English language.[15] If the shadow of the KJV looms large over most modern English Bible translations, the shadow of Tyndale looms large over the KJV.

Tyndale's writings and translation work kept him on the run from those who sought his life, but he could not run forever. In 1535, the same year his final revision was released, Tyndale was betrayed by an associate and arrested by the authorities. He spent the rest of the year and much of 1536 in prison. His words from prison echo those of the apostle Paul:

> I believe, most excellent Sir, that you are not unacquainted with the decision reached concerning me. On which account, I beseech your lordship, even by the Lord Jesus, that if I am to pass the winter here, to urge upon the lord commissary, if he will deign, to send me from my goods in his keeping a warmer cap, for I suffer greatly from cold in the head, being troubled with a continual catarrh, which is aggravated in this prison vault. A warmer coat also, for that which I have is very thin. Also cloth for repairing my leggings. My overcoat is worn out; the shirts also are worn out.[16]

Even in prison, wiling away his final days, he tried to continue his translation of the Old Testament: "But above all, I beg and entreat your clemency earnestly to intercede with the lord commissary, that he would deign to allow me the use of my Hebrew Bible, Hebrew Grammar, and Hebrew Lexicon, and that I might employ my time with that study."[17] We do not know if this request was granted, but the likelihood that he would have been allowed to continue translation in prison seems low. In August 1536, he was found to be guilty of heresy, and on



Fo. cxciy.

The Epistle off the Apostle Paul / to the Romaynes.

The fyrst Chapter.

PAul the servaunte off Jesus Christ / called vnto the office off an apostle / putt a parte to preache the gospell of God / which he promysed afore by his prophetes / in the holy scriptures that make mēsion of his sone / the which was begotten of the seede of David / as pertaynynge to the flesshe / and declared to be the sonne of God with power / of the holy goost / that sanctifieth / sence the tyme that Jesus Christ oure lorde rose agayne from deeth / by whom we have receaved grace and apostleshippe / thatt all gentiles shulde obeye to the fayth which is in his name / of the which nombre are ye also / which are Jesus Christes by vocacion.

To all you of Rome beloved of God / ād sanctes by callynge. Grace be with you and peace from God oure father / and from the lorde Jesus Christ.

Fyrst verely I thanke my god thorow Jesus Christ for you all / be cause youre faith is publisshed through out all the worlde. For god is my

Ames.

Figure 18.2. The opening of the Paul's epistle to the Romans from the 1526 Peter Schöffer printing of William Tyndale's translation.

October 6, he was brought out for execution. Tyndale was tied to the stake, first strangled, and then his body burned, dying a martyr's death for his life's work to give the English people the Bible in their own language. His final words were, "Lord, open the king of England's eyes!" That prayer, though he may not have known it, was being answered even as Tyndale died.

The Coverdale Bible (1535)

Tyndale may have died, but English Bible translation did not die with him: forces were already at work in England to pave the way for widespread acceptance of English translations. King Henry VIII's disputes with Rome over annulling his marriage to Catherine of Aragon ultimately led to his breaking with Rome in 1534. While he himself was not reform-minded, his battles with the Roman Catholic Church led to the elevation of figures who were Protestants. Notable among these were Thomas Cromwell, the king's chief minister, and Thomas Cranmer, the archbishop of Canterbury. Through the influence and urging of these two men, as well as the December 1534 petition of the bishops, Henry was persuaded to allow for the Bible to be translated into English and placed in every church in England.

The man who was entrusted with producing this Bible was Myles Coverdale (1488–1559), an associate and friend of William Tyndale, who had in fact assisted Tyndale in preparing his translation. Next to Tyndale, Coverdale is the second-most influential individual in the history of English Bible translations. In 1535, he printed a translation of the complete Bible (including the Apocrypha)—the first to be printed in the English language. In his dedication, Coverdale said he had "with a clear conscience purely and faithfully translated this out of five sundry interpreters."[18] Who were these five interpreters? As it turns out, they were Tyndale, two German translations, and two Latin translations. Unlike Tyndale, Coverdale was proficient in neither Greek nor Hebrew and so he was forced to rely upon these other translations. The New Testament is essentially a revision of Tyndale's work, while the Old Testament is translated out of the Latin and German. Coverdale's usage of German resulted in him coining new terms for certain German words, such as "unoutspeakable" as an English equivalent of the German *unaussprechlich*. Yet he is also credited for having a good ear for English turns of phrase, being responsible for introducing such familiar words and expressions into English as "the valley of the shadow of death", "lovingkindness," and "cast me not away from thy presence," to name a few.[19]

The translation appears to been favored by Queen Anne Boleyn, and it is possible that this had some effect upon King Henry VIII. In any event, when another printing was run in 1537, it carried with it the king's license. A year after Tyndale's death and the Bible was being printed in England freely with the king's permission.

The Matthew Bible (1537)

The same year that Coverdale's revised Bible was printed with the king's license, another translation appeared under the name of Thomas Matthew also bearing the king's license. Though the translation is remembered as the Matthew Bible, it was actually the work of John Rogers, published under the pseudonym of Thomas Matthew. The Matthew Bible was not a new translation; it was in fact largely the work of Tyndale. Tyndale was still a controversial figure, and could not yet be openly acknowledged, but the Matthew Bible is essentially the Tyndale Bible as far as he had completed it. Rogers incorporated Tyndale's 1535 New Testament, as well as what was substantially Tyndale's translation of the Pentateuch and his unpublished translations of the historical books up through 2 Chronicles. Those books that were never translated by Tyndale were supplemented by Coverdale's Old Testament and Apocrypha. This was a remarkable turnaround for the work of Tyndale. As one historian has summarized the state of affairs,

> Within twelve months of the martyrdom of its author [Tyndale] at Vilvorde, the translation which "either with glosses or without" had been denounced, abused, and burnt at St. Paul's Cross, was now, under its assumed name, formally approved by the King's grace, and published together with Coverdale's Bible, under the shelter of a royal proclamation and license.[20]

Tyndale's life's work to bring the Bible to the people in the English language was now being realized openly, and that largely through his own translations. "It was a signal act of justice," F. F. Bruce has commented, "ordinary justice and poetic justice too—that the first English Bible to be published under royal license should be Tyndale's Bible… even if it was not yet advisable to associate Tyndale's name with it publicly."[21] And the progression of the English Bible's acceptance in the public life of England would continue to roll on.

The Great Bible (1539)

There was a need for a common Bible in the Church of England, but the Matthew Bible could not fit the bill. It contained many marginal notes explaining the text which were of a decidedly Protestant character, and this was not entirely to the liking of some of the clergy. Thomas Cromwell desired that a common Bible should be issued to the churches in England, and so he commissioned Myles Coverdale to revise the Matthew Bible in a version that contained no notes. The result of this revision was what history remembers as the Great Bible, so named for its rather large size (about 15 x 9 inches). The close relationship of English Bible translations continued, such that the Great Bible was, in effect, "Coverdale's revision of John Rogers' revision of Tyndale's Bible, so far as Tyndale's Bible went."[22] The new Bible was to be used in every church in England, and as such was the first authorized Bible in the Church of England.

The greatest impact of the Great Bible on the history of English Bibles was in its ordering of the books. Tyndale had followed the practice of Martin Luther of placing Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation at the end of the New Testament and marking the books without numbers, so that the New Testament books were numbered as 23, and the Coverdale and Matthew Bibles had followed the same practice. The Great Bible broke with this tradition and arranged the New Testament as Erasmus had done in his printed Greek text, and this is the ordering of the New Testament that comes down to us in the present. Coverdale's translations of the Psalms were carried over into the Great Bible, and they were incorporated into the Book of Common Prayer in 1549 by Thomas Cranmer where they remained in continuous use until the late twentieth century.

King Henry VIII was a volatile king, and his favor waxed and waned rapidly. Though he had allowed for the printing of three English Bible translations, he

soon turned against some of them. Tyndale's translation—that is, that which was identified by his name—was banned by an act of Parliament in 1543. Furthermore, this act forbade the public reading or expounding of the Bible, as well as banning the private reading of Scripture for lower classes of people. Following the 1543 Act of Parliament, Henry himself issued a proclamation that made it illegal to possess either Tyndale or Coverdale's translations, and many of them were burned at St Paul's Cross.[23] The irony of the whole state of affairs is that the Great Bible remained the authorized Bible for the Church of England and it was still substantially Tyndale and Coverdale's work; the burning of translations bearing their names hardly removed their influence from the land.

The Geneva Bible (1560)

Tumultuous times followed Henry's death in 1547. His son, Edward, succeeded him on the throne and proceeded with a program of making the Church of England more Protestant, but this was cut short with his untimely death in 1553. The Roman Catholic Mary Tudor, often remembered as Bloody Mary, came to power in 1554 and attempted to purge England of Protestantism and restore Catholicism. This led to the martyrdom of many notable figures, including John Rogers in 1555 and Thomas Cranmer the following year. Other Protestants fled England and sought refuge on the continent. Mary's reign was short, ending with her death in 1558, and her Protestant half-sister Elizabeth assumed the throne in her place. Queen Elizabeth established a form of religious compromise known as the Elizabeth Settlement. It is often referred to as a *via media* (middle way), for it blended the outward appearances of the Roman Catholic liturgy with Protestant theology. England became undeniably Protestant once again, but not Protestant enough for a minority group which came to be known as Puritans. The Puritans would be a thorn in Elizabeth's side and would form a distinct group within (and sometimes without) the Church of England. It is out of the upheaval of the reign of Mary Tudor that the Geneva Bible was produced, and it was in the context of religious dispute that the Geneva Bible would exist for the English people.

The Geneva Bible is known as such due to the location of its translation: Geneva, Switzerland, the city of John Calvin (1509–1564) and bastion of the Reformed faith. The translation was the product of a team of scholars who had taken refuge in Geneva, to include William Whittingham and, once again, Myles Coverdale. Whittingham published a revision of Tyndale's New Testament in 1557, and soon after worked with the group of scholars to produce a thorough revision of the earlier translations, particularly of the Old Testament. Unlike the earlier translations of the Old Testament, the Geneva was done in full consultation with the Hebrew original, making the Geneva Bible the first to be fully

translated from the original languages. The completed translation appeared in 1560 and quickly distinguished itself as the best translation to appear in English to date. Not only was its translation quality better, but it was also more portable, had an easier typeface to read, and was the first English translation to incorporate verses in addition to chapters. It may be thought of as the first study Bible, for it included maps and tables, marginal notes to alert the reader to alternate or literal translations, and copious notes commenting upon the text. The commentary notes were openly Calvinistic in nature at points and were not seen as wholly friendly to the monarchy in England. These distinctions meant that the Geneva Bible very quickly became the most popular English translation to date, at least for the ordinary English Bible reader. This was the Bible used by John Knox and the Church of Scotland, it was the Bible of Shakespeare, and the Bible that the Pilgrims would carry with them to the New World. The immense popularity of the Geneva Bible is seen in its longevity and number of print editions: between 1560 and 1644, it would go through 140 different editions.[24] If the notes had not raised the ire of King James, it is possible that the translation would have retained its popularity even longer.

The Bishops' Bible (1568)

The success of the Geneva Bible showed the deficiencies in the Great Bible, but the unabashed Calvinism of the notes in the Geneva Bible made it distasteful to Queen Elizabeth and many leaders of the Church of England, and thus unacceptable for official usage. In response, a new revision of the Great Bible was commissioned to improve upon the earlier translation and to provide a viable and scholarly alternative to the Geneva. The translators were instructed to ensure that there were no "bitter or controversial annotations" in the text, a direct rebuke of the practice of the Geneva Bible.[25]

The Bishops' Bible was an overall improvement in quality over the Great Bible, and, as Bruce has noted, "Had the Geneva Bible never been produced, the Bishops' Bible would have been the best English Bible to appear thus far."[26] But the Geneva Bible had been produced, and the Bishops' Bible simply could not compare for its level of scholarship and readability. It replaced the Great Bible as the official Bible of the Church of England and gained its place in the public life of the church, but the Geneva Bible continued to dominate private usage. The competition between the two translations would create one of the issues that would precipitate the commissioning of the King James Version.

The Douay-Rheims (1582/1609)

Stepping somewhat outside of the direct line of translations, it is worth taking note of the first authorized Roman Catholic foray into translation of the Bible into English. The Douay-Rheims translation provides an interesting parallel to both Tyndale's translation and the Geneva Bible in that the translators fled England and performed the work of translation in exile. In this case, it was the production of Roman Catholic scholars who had left England during the reign of Elizabeth. The New Testament was largely the work of one man, Gregory Martin; it was published in 1582 in the city of Rheims. The Old Testament was essentially completed at the same time, but funds did not allow for it to be published until 1609 into 1610 in the city of Douay. The translation thus derives its name from this twofold process of publishing.

In 1546, the Council of Trent had declared that the Latin Vulgate, due to its long usage, to "be in public lectures, disputations, sermons and expositions, held as authentic, and that no one dare or presume under any pretext whatsoever to reject it."[27] In other words, the Latin was deemed to be the most authoritative text. The translators, as faithful Roman Catholics, honored the Latin as the authoritative text by translating from it rather than from the Greek or Hebrew, and did so, in their own words, "not only in sense… but sometimes in the very words also and phrases, which may seem to the vulgar reader and to common English ears not yet acquainted therewith, rudeness or ignorance."[28] The impact of this preference for the Latin down to "the very words also and phrases" is that the English was Latinized in various places. Rather than using plain English words, vocabulary borrowed from Latin, such as "supererogate" or "prefinition," were rendered instead. Interestingly, however, it does not appear that the translators stuck strictly with the Latin, as it shows signs that it had relied on other translations.[29]

In the overall history of English Bible translation, the Douay-Rheims has had a comparatively smaller impact due to not standing in the direct line of Tyndale's translation. Though it does not have the same prestige as the KJV, the Douay-Rheims functioned as the only authorized English translation for Roman Catholics until the twentieth century.

The King James Version

Of all Bible translations, none other has been so influential and so widely used as the King James Version (KJV), also known in England as the Authorized Version (AV). For over 200 years, the KJV served as the sole translation for the English-speaking world and has largely epitomized what we think of when we hear the Bible in English. Its story is fascinating in and of itself, and whole books have been written about it. We tell its story here in brief.

The Creation of the King James Version

The original impetus for producing a new English Bible version has its roots in the Hampton Court Conference of 1604. Queen Elizabeth had died in 1603, and her successor, King James VI of Scotland, became King James I of England. The accession of the Scottish King James, who had had to support the Presbyterian Scottish Church during his reign over Scotland, presented the Puritans with what they thought would be an opportunity to make their requests known before a king who may be more friendly to their line of thinking than Elizabeth had been. About a thousand Puritan ministers signed a petition, known as the Millenary Petition, calling for further reform in the Church of England. As it turned out, the Puritans were mistaken; James despised Presbyterianism and saw it as a threat to monarchy, and he would be no friend to the Puritan cause. Yet he was stepping in as head of a church that had growing divides within it. Thus one of his first affairs of business as king of England was to call the Hampton Court Conference with various leaders from the Church of England, which was to meet three times over a five-day period. The small Puritan party was led by John Rainolds, while the much larger ecclesiastical party was led by Richard Bancroft, the bishop of London and future Archbishop of Canterbury.

King James apparently gained much enjoyment in toying with the Anglican clergymen and took especial delight in verbally thrashing the Puritans. All of the Puritan petitions were rejected by James, save one, and that one was not even on the books as an official request. During the conference, the Puritan Rainolds, at least in the words of the hostile Toby Matthew, had requested that there be "one only translation of the Bible… declared authentical, and read in church." Bancroft immediately protested, yet this idea struck James as a worthwhile endeavor. He claimed that he had yet to see "a Bible well translated into English" and thought that of all of the Bible translations in existence, "that of Geneva is the worst."[30] The translation gave James a chance to mollify the Puritans, improve upon the Bishop's Bible, and provide an alternative to the popular, yet personally despised Geneva Bible.

King James granted this one petition from the Puritans, but the translation would be on terms acceptable to both the king and the established church. As such, fifteen rules were laid down for the translators in how to proceed with the work.[31] Some of these rules were simply procedural, such as the first rule, which ordered that "The ordinary Bible read in the Church, commonly called the Bishops' Bible, to be followed, and as little altered as the Truth of the original will permit." The new translation was thus to be a revision of the Bishops' Bible, and not a completely new translation. The translators were also commissioned to consult other earlier translations: "These translations to be used when they agree

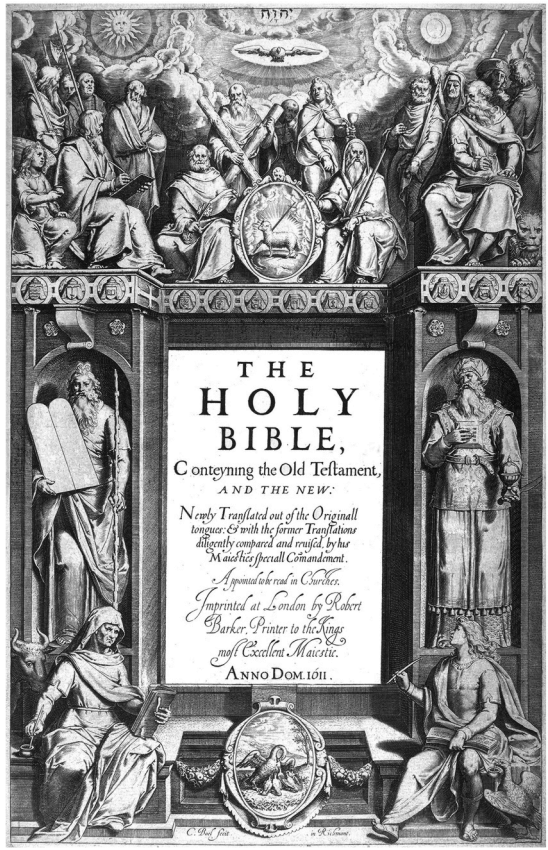

THE
HOLY
BIBLE,
Conteyning the Old Testament,
AND THE NEW:
Newly Translated out of the Originall tongues: & with the former Translations diligently compared and revised, by his Maiesties speciall Comandement.
Appointed to be read in Churches.
Imprinted at London by Robert Barker, Printer to the Kings most Excellent Maiestie.
Anno Dom. 1611.

Figure 18.3. The cover of the 1611 King James Version. The twelve apostles are at the top, Moses and Aaron are on either side of the centerpiece, and the four evangelists are represented in the four corners.

better with the Text than the Bishops' Bible: Tyndale's, Matthew's, Coverdale's, Whitchurch's, Geneva" (Rule 14). Two of the rules had especial political and theological implications, ensuring that the new translation was to both the king's liking and the theology and polity of the Church of England. Rule 2 stated that "The Old Ecclesiastical Words to be kept, viz. the Word Church not to be translated Congregation etc." There was to be no repeat of Tyndale replacing the old words, and the traditional language accepted by the Church of England was to be respected. Furthermore, Rule 6 ordered that "No Marginal Notes at all to be affixed, but only for the explanation of the Hebrew or Greek Words, which cannot without some circumlocution, so briefly and fitly be expressed in the Text." Implicitly in view are the notes of the Geneva Bible; this rule would ensure

that no potentially subversive or controversial notes would accompany the new translation.

The work of translation was split amongst six different committees, comprising about 54 scholars (the lists do not entirely agree). These men were some of the most educated of their day. The most distinguished of these was Lancelot Andrewes, the dean of Westminster, who would lead the First Westminster Company. He was one of, if not the most learned man of his time, and was said to have mastered at least fifteen languages. Gordon Campbell has called the collective learning of the translators "daunting," and commented, "it would be difficult now to bring together a group of more than fifty scholars with the range of languages and knowledge of other disciplines that characterized the KJV translators. We may live in a world with more knowledge, but it is populated by people with less knowledge."[32] These companies commenced work in earnest in 1607 and finished it in 1609. From there it went to a revision committee, which worked for about nine months putting the final touches on the translation. By 1611, it was ready for printing. The job was carried out by the king's printer, Robert Barker.

The preface to the King James Version was written by Miles Smith on behalf of the translators, and in it, we find an elucidation of the principles that they followed and a general defense of the translation. The translators made clear that they were building upon the labors of the past and that "we never thought from the beginning that we should need to make a new translation, nor yet to make of a bad one a good one… but to make a good one better, or out of many good ones, one principal good one."[33] The translators were scrupulous, working slowly and carefully through their work. Not only did they consult the aforementioned earlier English translations, but also translations in other languages, both contemporary and ancient:

> Neither did we think much to consult the translators or commentators, Chaldee, Hebrew, Syrian, Greek, or Latin, no, nor the Spanish, French, Italian, or Dutch; neither did we disdain to revise that which we had done, and to bring back to the anvil that which we had hammered: but having and using as great helps as were needful, and fearing no reproach for slowness, nor coveting praise for expedition, we have at the length, through the good hand of the Lord upon us, brought the work to that pass that you see.[34]

In accordance with Rule 7, the translators set alternate possible translations in the margins, a practice that they saw a need to defend.

> Some peradventure would have no variety of senses to be set in the margin, lest the authority of the Scriptures for deciding of controversies by that show of uncertainty should somewhat be shaken. But we hold their judgement not to be so sound in

> this point. … it hath pleased God in His divine providence here and there to scatter words and sentences of that difficulty and doubtfulness, not in doctrinal points that concern salvation, (for in such it hath been vouched that the Scriptures are plain) but in matters of less moment.[35]

The translators freely admitted that they were not always sure of certain words, especially in Hebrew, necessitating the marginal notes to make clear where this was the case:

> Again, there be many rare names of certain birds, beasts, and precious stones, etc. concerning which the Hebrews themselves are so divided among themselves for judgement, that they may seem to have defined this or that, rather because they would say something, than because they were sure of that which they said, as Saint Jerome somewhere saith of the Septuagint. Now in such a case, doth not a margin do well to admonish the reader to seek further, and not to conclude or dogmatize upon this or that peremptorily? For as it is a fault of incredulity, to doubt of those things that are evident; so to determine of such things as the Spirit of God hath left (even in the judgment of the judicious) questionable, can be no less than presumption. Therefore as Saint Augustine saith, that variety of translations is profitable for the finding out of the sense of the Scriptures: so diversity of signification and sense in the margin, where the next is not so clear, must needs do good, yea, is necessary, as we are persuaded.[36]

The ultimate goal of the translation was for it to be understood by all: "we desire that the Scripture may speak like itself, as in the language of Canaan, that it may be understood even of the very vulgar [i.e., the common person]."[37] The same driving force that animated Tyndale also animated the translators of the KJV: to produce the Word of God in a language that even the plowboy could understand.

Since the KJV is a revision of earlier translations, one of the interesting side effects is that its language was already somewhat old-fashioned by the time it was published. Alistair McGrath chalks this up to the conservative nature of the revisions that took place during the sixteenth century and the subsequent conservative linguistic nature of the KJV translation guidelines, which was to alter as little as possible its base text of the Bishop's Bible.[38] A striking example of how conservative the language of the KJV is can be seen in the consistent usage of "thee," "thou," and "thy" as singular second-person pronouns. In the course of time, these pronouns had fallen out of common English usage and were replaced by the more formal and (originally) plural form of address, "you," which then took on both roles of referring to singular and plural "you." The "thee" form was largely obsolete in the English language by the time we come to the end of the 1500s, yet

Tyndale	KJV
Judge not that ye be not judged. For as ye judge so shall ye be judged. And with what measure ye mete with the same shall it be measured to you again. Why seest thou a mote in thy brothers eye and percievest not the beam that is in thine own eye. Or why sayest thou to thy brother: suffer me to pluck out the mote out of thine eye and behold a beame is in thine own eye. Hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye and then shalt thou see clearly to pluck out the mote out of thy brothers eye.	Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.

Figure 18.4. A comparison of Matthew 7:1–3 in Tyndale's translation and in the KJV. Spelling modernized for both.

it was firmly entrenched in the 1611 translation. Figure 18.4 contains a comparison of William Tyndale's translation and that of the KJV showing how little had changed in places over the course of nearly a hundred years.

While the King James Version is widely regarded as the greatest translation completed to that point in time, it is the culmination of all that had come before and did not arise in a vacuum. As a revision, it built upon the foundation that earlier translations had laid. As Bruce Metzger summarizes, "A great deal of the praise, therefore, that is given to it belongs to its predecessors. For the idiom and vocabulary, Tyndale deserves the greatest credit; for the melody and harmony, Coverdale; for scholarship and accuracy, the Geneva version."[39] What the KJV translators accomplished was to take the best qualities of the English translation tradition and combine it into a single, principle translation.

The Life of the KJV

While the KJV would come to have complete dominance in the English-speaking world, it was not immediately popular. In McGrath's words, its publication "caused scarcely a ripple to pass over the face of English society at the time."[40] The Geneva Bible was still the unquestioned favorite of the Bible reading public. Interestingly, many of the Scripture quotations in the preface to the KJV are taken from the Geneva rather than from the new translation. King James's disdain for the Geneva Bible resulted in a ban on further printings of it in 1616, and this would have in theory meant that the KJV would become the only Bible in use

in England, but this was not to be just yet. The Geneva Bible was imported from the continent and continued to be printed surreptitiously by the king's own printer, Robert Barker, who printed subsequent editions with the fraudulent date of 1599. It would continue to be printed until 1644. Only after the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 would the KJV finally assume its place as the dominant translation in the English-speaking world.[41]

The KJV was almost superseded between the years of 1642 and 1659 after the Puritans deposed and executed King Charles I and the nation was led by the Puritan-dominated Long Parliament. The new translation was viewed with hostility as a product of the monarchical system that commissioned it, and there were some calls for it to be revised and replaced by a better translation. Yet these calls were never answered and, with the return of the monarchy in 1660, no further challenges were posed to the KJV. The restoration of the king essentially sounded the death knell for the Geneva Bible; in McGrath's colorful words, England "turned its back on Puritanism as quickly and totally as Germany disowned its Nazi past after the Second World War."[42] The Geneva Bible became associated with sedition in not only the king's mind but also in the common English consciousness; nobody wanted to be publicly associated with a translation that had been so closely tied to years of Puritan chaos. The Geneva faded from view, and the last translation standing was the KJV.

The KJV went through various printed editions during its history.[43] Some of these editions are best known due to unfortunate misprints in them. A 1631 edition, commonly referred to as the Wicked Bible, accidentally omitted the word "not" in Exodus 20:14, such that the text read "Thou shalt commit adultery." This mistake resulted in a large fine for Robert Barker, who ultimately lived out his final days in debtors' prison. An edition of 1653 again missed a "not," with 1 Corinthians 16:9 reading as, "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall inherit the kingdom of God?" The printer's errors that occurred necessitated various corrected editions, which in turn often introduced new errors. The text was also updated through the years along the lines of spelling standardization and grammatical alterations. The most enduring edition of the KJV is a 1769 edition compiled by Benjamin Blayney, who, in one scholar's estimation, might possibly be considered "the single most important individual in the history of the KJV, because the twenty-first-century text of the Bible is essentially Blayney's text."[44] The text of the KJV has largely been stable since this time onward.

For over two hundred years, the KJV was the only Bible in usage in the English-speaking world. It was not until the late nineteenth century that any viable English Bible alternatives existed, and it was not until the twentieth century that the KJV would begin to be overtaken by these other versions. The long-term

effect of this dominance means that the language of the KJV has shaped our collective Christian imaginations. It became not just a translation *of* the Bible, but it became *the* Bible for the English-speaking world.

Conclusion

The English Bible arose out of times of strife and great change. Translating the Bible into English was mired in controversy right from the very start, and this continued on through the creation of the King James Version. Yet it is also the product of men who desired that the Bible be accessible in English to the common man or woman in the street. The process was not always smooth, but the Lord used flawed men and flawed processes to bring the Bible into common usage in the English-speaking world.

The history of English Bible translation during this period is best summed up in a single word: revision. There is a very definite chain stretching through the sixteenth and into the seventeenth century. The translations became so intertwined that it is hard to speak of a single translator or a single translation team. Very often, if we were to read a passage in the KJV, our instinct might be to ask why the KJV translators translated the passage in that way, when we really should be asking why Tyndale or Coverdale did so and why the KJV translators saw no need to alter it. As we will see in the following chapter, this chain of revision continues right on down to the present day.

Further Reading

Benson, Bobrick. *Wide as the Waters: The Story of the English Bible and the Revolution it Inspired*. New York: Penguin Books 2001.

Campbell, Gordon. *Bible: The Story of the King James Version 1611–2011*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

McGrath, Alister. *In the Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible and How It Changed a Nation, a Language, and a Culture*. New York: Doubleday, 2001.

19.
Modern English Bible Translations

The days of a single Bible translation functioning as the sole Bible for English speakers are long behind us, and it appears that there is no going back. Go to popular online Bible websites and you will find numerous English Bible translations to choose from. As of this writing, on BibleGateway alone, you will find 62 English translations. How did we get here and why are there so many translations nowadays? In this chapter, we will bring our story of English Bible history to a close in the present day.

The First Alternatives to the KJV

The King James Version was largely the uncontested Bible of the English-speaking people until the emergence of the New Testament of the Revised Version (RV) in 1881. There were, however, some additional Bible translations that, though often forgotten, appeared in the intervening period. There was the New Testament of Edward Harwood in 1768, a version said to have "aimed at elegance, perspicuity, and propriety, and achieved pomposity;"[1] there was Charles Thomson's translation of 1808, the first to be translated and printed in America and the first printed by a woman; there was the 1833 revision of the KJV by Noah Webster, who sought to update its outdated, and in his view, vulgar language; there was Robert Young's 1862 literal translation of the Bible, meant to bring the English reader as close as possible to the original languages; there was the 1871 translation of the New Testament by the father of Dispensationalism, John Nelson

Darby, complete with a textual apparatus referencing the newest textual discoveries; and there was the translation of Julia E. Smith, published in 1876, the first Bible translation completed by a woman.[2] Most of these translations have largely been forgotten by history, and none have left their mark in terms of any long term usage, aside from perhaps Young's Literal Translation as a study tool. These intervening translations are best thought of as private translations, largely functioning as personal Bibles and never having any widespread public usage in the churches. While they never caught on, they represent a desire to bring a new translation into English as an alternative to the KJV.

Advances in scholarship raised the need for a revision of the KJV to be made. The nineteenth century was a time of great discovery: Codex Sinaiticus had been discovered by Constantin von Tischendorf, Codex Vaticanus was becoming more well known, and all the while there was a growing awareness that the Textus Receptus had its own particular weaknesses when compared to these older discoveries (see Chapter 14). The English Bible rested upon a printed text that less accurately preserved the text of the New Testament, and this was a problem that needed remedied.

Spurring on some of the desire and need for a new translation was also the recognition that the English of the KJV had become outdated and had been so for some time. Its language was already somewhat old fashioned by the time it was completed, and the passing of time only made this more acute. Around 1782, Benjamin Franklin contended that a new English Bible translation was necessary since the "language in that time is much changed, and the stile being obsolete, and thence less agreeable" and he believed this contributed to the overall lack of Bible reading in his day.[3] The explicit reason given for Noah Webster's own translation was the language had shifted and there were changes in the words that "in particular passages, impair the beauty, in others, obscure the sense of the original languages." He further added, "Some words have fallen into disuse; and the signification of others, in current popular use, is not the same now as it was when they were introduced into the version."[4] English had been on the move, and so Bible translation needed to catch up.

Of the two factors, advances in textual scholarship were the most ostensible, though language change made it all the more necessary. The impetus for a new revision came from a February 1870 motion of parliament, submitted by Dr Wilberforce, the Bishop of Winchester, who moved that a committee be appointed to give a report upon whether a revision was necessary due to passages containing "plain and clear errors, whether in the Hebrew or Greek text originally adopted by the translators, or in the translation made from the same," should they indeed be determined to exist.[5] The committee indeed found that a revision was

necessary. The revision of the KJV was commissioned with the express principle that alterations were to be as few as possible and only as needed, yet at the same time it was to depend upon a text "for which the evidence is decidedly preponderating"; in other words, the translators were not to work on the basis of the Textus Receptus where it was found to be lacking, but from what was considered to be a superior textual basis. Textual changes were to be noted in the margins.[6] In addition to the commissioning of a group of British scholars, a group of American scholars were also invited to participate in the project, although the balance of power lay more with the British. If there were any disputes between the two parties, the Americans were to defer to the British, a state of affairs that would lead to the American Standard Version of 1901.

Work on the translation began in 1872, and in all, lasted for over a decade, with the New Testament being completed in 1881, the Old Testament 1885, and the revision of the Apocrypha later being completed in 1895. The RV updated the language of the KJV to some extent, but retained much of the archaic language (i.e., "thee," "thou," verbs translated with -eth endings). It also introduced elements that were great improvements upon that of the KJV, improvements that continue to be reproduced in Bible translations down to the present. No longer was every single verse its own paragraph as in the KJV, but the text was arranged according to its literary genre: prose writing was arranged into paragraphs, while poetry was arranged in poetic meter. It also further increased the consistency in translation style. While the KJV translators felt no need to confine themselves to single English words for their Hebrew or Greek equivalents, this variation was done in such a way that it might not be readily apparent where the same word was in view. Some examples of multiple renderings of the same word are where the KJV used "Areopagus" in Acts 17:19, and then "Mars Hill" in Acts 17:22, or in Romans 5:2–11, where the same word is translated successively as "*rejoice* in hope of the glory of God," then "we *glory* in tribulations," and lastly as "we also *joy* in God."[7] The RV rendered these stylistic variations in a more consistent manner and in a way that was more transparent to the underlying text.

Initial reaction to the RV was very enthusiastic: in 1881, the New Testament sold 300,000 copies the day it was published, and it once sold a million copies in a single day. Some newspapers even ran the new translation in a serialized form.[8] Yet this excitement and enthusiasm quickly waned. One major reason for this was its literary quality. While the RV may be considered an improvement in the accuracy of its translation, what it gained in accuracy it lost in literary beauty. Natural English was sacrificed on the altar of literal translation. Charles Spurgeon summed up the thoughts of many when he considered the revisers to be "strong

in Greek, weak in English."[9] It did not have the beauty to capture the hearts of a Bible-reading public who had been so accustomed to the majesty of the KJV.

Another Bible revision soon followed the RV. The British committee of the RV largely did not heed the recommendations of the Americans across the pond, which led to the American scholars producing their own version of the RV with their own particular changes. According to the agreement between British and American translation committees, the Americans would need to wait 14 years due to copyright restrictions before they could publish a version with their own preferred alterations. In 1901, this American revision, known as the American Standard Version (ASV), was published. It is substantially the same as the RV and the same criticisms and praise apply, though perhaps to a lesser extent. The ASV still used some archaic language, but it updated the language more than the RV did. What made it unique was its extensive use of the divine name "Jehovah" throughout the Old Testament instead of the familiar rendering of "LORD," a practice that very few translations have consistently followed. The ASV enjoyed more acceptance in America than did the RV in Great Britain, but it would also never compete for the hearts and minds of the general American public.

One of the most damning factors in the failure of the RV and ASV to catch on was their usage of a different Greek base text for the translation than that used for the KJV. In the eyes of many, this was tantamount to tampering with the Bible itself. A particularly vehement critic of the RV was William John Burgon (1813 – 1888), the Dean of Chichester. Burgon excoriated the RV for its divergences from the KJV and Textus Receptus—criticism which would have equally applied to the ASV had he lived to see it:

> The *English* (as well as the Greek) of the newly "Revised Version" is hopelessly at fault. It is to me simply unintelligible how a company of Scholars can have spent ten years in elaborating such a very unsatisfactory production. Their uncouth phraseology and their jerky sentences, their pedantic obscurity and their unidiomatic English, contrast painfully with "the happy turns of expression, the music of the cadences, the felicities of the rhythm" of our Authorized Version. The transition from one to the other, as the Bishop of Lincoln remarks, is like exchanging a well-built carriage for a vehicle without springs, in which you get jolted to death on a newly-mended and rarely-traversed road. But the "Revised Version" is inaccurate as well; exhibits defective scholarship, I mean, in countless places.
>
> It is, however, the *systematic depravation of the underlying Greek* which does so grievously offend me: for this is nothing else but a poisoning of the River of Life at its sacred source. Our Revisers, (with the best and purest intentions, no doubt,) stand

> convicted of having deliberately rejected the words of Inspiration in every page, and of having substituted for them fabricated Readings which the Church has long since refused to acknowledge, or else has rejected with abhorrence; and which only survive at this time in a little handful of documents of the most depraved type.[10]

He would say further on,

> We venture to assure him, without a particle of hesitation, that ℵ [Sinaiticus] B [Vaticanus] D [Bezae] are *three of the most scandalously corrupt copies extant*:—exhibit *the most shamefully mutilated* texts which are anywhere to be met with:—have become, by whatever process (for their history is wholly unknown), the depositories of the largest amount of *fabricated readings*, ancient *blunders*, and *intentional perversions of Truth*,—which are discoverable in any known copies of the Word of God.[11]

In Burgon's view, deviating from the Textus Receptus toward what he considered to be a corrupted text was tantamount to rejecting the inspired words of Scripture. Attacks of this sort very much impacted the widespread reception of the RV and ASV, for who would want to read a corrupted Bible? Burgon's argumentation is very similar to what is still heard in the present by some defenders of the King James Only position, particularly as regards his estimation of Sinaiticus and Vaticanus as some of the most corrupted copies of Scripture.[12]

That the first alternatives to the KJV should be met with both yawns and scorn is something that should not be surprising given its long usage as the only English Bible translation. A joke has arisen about a man saying, "The King James Version was good enough for St. Paul, so it's good enough for me." It is humorous, but it reflects a very real way in which the KJV had come to be used: it was not simply *a translation* of the Bible, but it was *the Bible itself* for many in the English-speaking world. For a translation to become *the Bible* as opposed to just *a translation* is not without precedent; it actually should be expected given a long enough period of time. Around the early fifth century, when Jerome was translating the Old Testament from Hebrew into Latin into what became known as the Vulgate, he introduced changes into the translation that differed from the Old Latin versions then best known to the people. In one particular instance, Jerome had changed the familiar tree in Jonah from "gourd" to "ivy." When this was read in church, the congregation revolted and would not settle down until the reader reverted to reading the passage in the familiar way. Augustine urged Jerome to follow the LXX in his Latin translation so as to prevent further offense to the flock.[13] We have also already seen how Erasmus's printed Greek text aroused controversy in his day. Not only was his Greek text controversial, but so was his translation which sought to correct the Latin of the time. And of course, we should

not forget that similar motivations undergirded opposition to the translation of the Bible into English; English was not a valid receptor language, and bringing it into English inevitably changed what was the authentic text in Latin. We should remember that translation of the Bible is not *the Bible itself* such that altering the translation is tantamount to altering Scripture, but we should also keep in mind that long usage of a single translation tends to produce this reaction.

From the 1950s and On

If we were to go back merely a hundred years, we would be entering a world in which the KJV was still by far the most commonly used Bible translation, and (assuming an American audience), the ASV was making some inroads. The RV and ASV did not quite open the floodgates to new English Bible translations, but they allowed the trickle to start that would eventually become a flood. Different translations were appearing, but in practice, diversity of usage was still fairly limited. Fast forward to the present, and there is now a plethora of English Bible translations in existence and still more being published. The vast number of English translations means we cannot fully tell the history of the Bible in English down to the present, but we can hit upon the major touchstones along the road that have brought us to where we are today as we take brief glances at those translations that are some of the most noteworthy as of the writing of this book.

Revised Standard Version (1952)

The publication of the RSV in 1952 marked a significant development in English Bible translations. It is a revision of the ASV and is an American produced translation which stands firmly in the Tyndale/KJV translation tradition. Whereas the RV and the ASV retained many of the older forms, the RSV updated the language to modern literary language. The "-eth" third person conjugation was modernized—"maketh" becomes "makes"—and the antiquated "thee" and "thou" were dropped for the standard "you," except where God is being addressed (such address was still deemed more proper). Overall, the translation is more on the formal equivalency end of the spectrum.

The RSV was deemed theologically deficient by many conservatives due in large part to how it translated Old Testament messianic passages, most notably where it followed the Masoretic Text instead of the Septuagint in its rendering of Isaiah 7:14, which read, "Behold, a young woman shall conceive," rather than the familiar "the virgin."[14] Sharp criticism of the RSV also centered around its choice of text. It translated from the shorter critical text, and so deviated in places from the KJV, shortening some verses and lacking others altogether. Much fierce denunciation abounded, with pamphlets written against it going by such titles as

The Bible of Antichrist, The New Blasphemous Bible, or *The New Bible… Why Christians Should not Accept It.* Some denounced it as a communist Bible. On one occasion, a pastor even took a blowtorch to the RSV from the pulpit.[15]

Conservative backlash notwithstanding, the RSV became something of an ecumenical Bible translation. In addition to the Apocrypha, the books of 3 and 4 Maccabees and Psalm 151 were included in a 1973 revision, making the translation acceptable to not only Protestants and Roman Catholics, but also to the Eastern Orthodox. Due to its general acceptability, the RSV is a popular translation amongst scholars. Its greatest long-term impact may not be its own use, however; it may be that its perceived liberalism served as part of the impetus for the explosion of evangelical Bible translations that were to follow it.

New American Standard Bible (1971)

The NASB may be thought of, in some respects, as standing at the head of a flood of consciously conservative and evangelical Bible translations. Published by the Lockman Foundation, the foreword specifies that the translation "has been produced with the conviction that the words of Scripture as originally penned in the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek were inspired by God."[16] It is a revision of the ASV and was something of an alternative to the RSV. Work on the translation began in 1959, leading to the publication of the New Testament in 1963. The entire Bible would be published in 1971. Revisions to the NASB followed in 1977, 1995, and 2020. The last revision moved in a more gender-accurate language direction in its translation philosophy, sparking a reaction that led to the production of the Legacy Standard Bible (LSB) in 2021, which in turn is a revision of the 1995 NASB.

The goal of the translation team was to "adhere as closely as possible to the original languages of the Holy Scriptures, and to make the translation in a fluent and readable style according to current English usage."[17] The NASB thus follows a formal equivalence translation philosophy and is generally known as the most literal on the spectrum of major Bible translations. As a result, it is very transparent to the original text, but it can also be accused of stilted English at times. A notable addition made by the NASB is its capitalization of divine pronouns. In earlier editions, the NASB included "Thee" and "Thou" in speech directed toward God, but these were modernized in the 1995 update. Because it is a faithful evangelical translation and is translated in a rather literal fashion, it is a popular translation of choice for Bible study.

New International Version (1978)

The impetus for the NIV came out of businessman Howard Long's struggle trying to witness to people using the KJV in the 1950s. When he would try to quote from the KJV, he found that people were often confused by the language or even found it laughable. With encouragement from his pastor, Long became an advocate for a more generally understandable translation of the Bible. This ultimately led to a conference in 1965 with wide evangelical representation that determined a new translation was indeed needed, and so was born the project to produce a new and more readable translation.[18] Published by the International Bible Society (now known as Biblica) and Zondervan, the New Testament was released in 1973, with the complete Bible published in 1978. A revision in 1984 followed shortly thereafter, which proved to be well received.

Unlike most major translations before it, the NIV is a completely fresh translation and is not a revision of any previous English version. Its translators were open about their fidelity to Scripture, being "united in their commitment to the authority and infallibility of the Bible as God's Word in written form."[19] The translation team was strongly represented by a broad group of over a hundred scholars from various denominations. In their approach to the translation, the translators sought to produce a highly readable version that still retained some of the cadence and familiar rhythms of the KJV. The NIV quickly caught on with the Bible reading public and has sold over 500 million copies since publication. It has even overtaken the KJV as the bestselling English Bible.[20]

Despite its wide popularity, the NIV is perhaps the most controversial major evangelical Bible translation, largely due to the controversy around "gender-neutral" language that erupted during the late 1990s over the NIV Inclusive Language Edition (NIVi), which was published in Britain in 1995 and 1996. The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood and James Dobson of Focus on the Family were particularly vocal critics of the usage of inclusive language. Dobson ended up calling together a meeting of biblical scholars at Focus on the Family in May of 1997, which resulted in the "Colorado Springs Guidelines for Translation of Gender-Related Language in Scripture," a document intended to define the limits of "gender-neutral" language.[21] The controversy continued on into the 2000s with the attempted revision of the NIV of 2005, called Today's New International Version (TNIV), which completely failed amidst its unpopularity and the reactions against it.[22] It was discontinued in 2009. A new NIV revision was produced in 2011 which rolled back some of the changes made to the TNIV, but it still retained many of them.[23] Despite the controversy, the NIV survived, and despite some lingering conservative doubts about its faithfulness, it remains a very popular translation and is the most notable mediating translation.

New King James Version (1982)

"Daddy, you make so many Bibles, why can't you make one I can understand?" Young Joe's question to his father, Sam Moore, president of Thomas Nelson Publishers, proved to be part of the genesis of the NKJV. Unable to find funding from other sources, Moore decided to underwrite the revision project himself.[24] The project began in 1975, leading to the publication of the New Testament in 1979, the Psalms in 1980, and the complete Bible in 1982. It underwent a single light revision in 1984.

In all, about 130 individuals took part in the production of the NKJV as translators, editors, and reviewers, each of whom signed a statement affirming their belief in the infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture. The project was provided with guidelines, such that its purpose was to "produce an updated English Version that follows the sentence structure of the 1611 Authorized Version as closely as possible" while updating the language for clarity, such that the translation would "transfer the Elizabethan word forms into twentieth-century English."[25] It was also to follow the Textus Receptus (TR) rather than the critical text. Though the NKJV was presented as a language update to the KJV, it ultimately became more of a revision at times, as there are places where the NKJV translators differed in their decisions from the KJV.[26] Overall, however, it may be viewed as a modernizing of the tradition. Since the NKJV exists in a world where most modern translations use the critical text, it includes footnotes where the TR differs from the critical text, as well as where it differs from the Majority Text in the New Testament. It is a popular choice for Bible study and is an alternative for those who may prefer the TR as a textual base over the critical text.

New Revised Standard Version (1989)

The NRSV was intended to fill the same role as the RSV: an ecumenical translation to serve the widest range of Christians possible. The primary motivation for producing the revision was to remove the archaisms of the RSV, eliminate "sex-biased" vocabulary, and bring advances in scholarship to bear on the translation.[27] The committee to revise the RSV was formed in 1974, which was represented by Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox scholars, along with a single Jewish scholar on the Old Testament committee.[28] The revision took the better part of 15 years to complete, with the revision being published in 1989 by the National Council of Churches. The NRSV has undergone one major revision, completed in 2021, in which it was rebranded as the NRSVue (NRSV Updated Edition).

The NRSV takes advantage of the advances in textual scholarship since the RSV was published in 1952, as well as bringing the language up to date and fully

eliminating the archaisms. The ecumenical focus is seen in that, just like the RSV, the NRSV is printed in editions that contain the deuterocanonical books. Also similar to the RSV, the NRSV functions as a popular translation for Bible scholars. The approach followed is generally that of the KJV legacy, and the translators consciously followed the maxim of "as literal as possible, as free as necessary," meaning the translation falls more on the spectrum of formal equivalence rather than functional.[29] The translation has largely been rejected by conservative Protestants, however, on the basis of its ecumenism and accusations of theological liberalism influencing the translation, in addition to its adoption of gender-neutral language due to what the translators saw as the danger of "linguistic sexism."[30] Because of this, it tends to be used in scholarly or more theologically liberal circles.

New Living Translation (1996)

The life of the NLT begins with the Living Bible (LB) of 1971, which was a paraphrase of the ASV done by Kenneth Taylor. The LB was very popular during the 1970s due to its readability, and this in turn led to a project in the late 1980s to revise the paraphrase into a full-fledged translation in consultation with the original languages. The result was the publication of the complete revision, the New Living Translation (NLT), in 1996. A second edition followed in 2004 and it has had subsequent light updates in 2007, 2013, and 2015.

The translators aimed to make the NLT a translation that "would make the same impact in the life of modern readers that the original text had for the original readers."[31] They also aimed to produce a translation for public reading, one designed to be read aloud while remaining clear for the contemporary reader.[32] As a result of this desire to clarify meaning, and also due to its origins as a revision of a paraphrase, the NLT is the freest of all of the major evangelical Bible translations in its translation philosophy. While the translation is still relatively young, it has become one of the most popular Bible translations in the United States.

New English Translation (2001)

Released originally as a free Bible only available on the internet, the NET Bible name plays off its online origins. In its preface, it states it "was commissioned to create a faithful Bible translation that could be placed on the Internet, downloaded for free, and used around the world for ministry."[33] The translation is a completely new translation, as opposed to a revision, and was produced by a team of over 25 evangelical scholars and is best known for its copious translators' notes, numbering at 60,932 in total according to its own count, making the NET Bible probably the best resource to give the average person a glimpse into the transla-

tion process. In translation philosophy, it is known as a mediating version between formal and functional equivalence, being similar in this regard to the NIV.

English Standard Version (2001)

The mid-1990s saw much controversy surrounding the topic of Bible translation, particularly around the question of gender-neutral translation. Concurrent with the controversy was also interest in producing a new essentially literal translation. In 1997, John Piper, the pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church, made a call to Lane Dennis, the president of Crossway, urging him on with a plan to produce the translation. In turn, Dennis began inquiring about obtaining the rights from the National Council of Churches to revise the 1971 edition of the RSV. The rights were obtained in 1998 and revision work began the same year, with the ESV being published by Crossway in 2001. Many notable conservative evangelical scholars, such as Wayne Grudem, J. I. Packer, and Bill Mounce, took part in the translation. Light revisions to the text were produced in 2007, 2011, 2016, and 2025.[34] A Roman Catholic edition (ESV-CE) including the deuterocanonical books was published in 2018.

The ESV very consciously stands in the traditional translation stream of the Tyndale Bible and KJV. As a revision of the RSV, it brings the English language up to date and removes archaisms which remained in the RSV. It adopts an essentially literal translation philosophy—what we have earlier referred to as formal equivalence—and strives to be as transparent to the original languages as possible.[35] In some regard, the translation is an alternative to the NRSV and its inclusive language, with the ESV retaining much masculine language that had been dropped, preferring the generic "man" and "he" as valid indefinite indicators. It is, in a sense, the product of the controversy over inclusive language of its times and conforms with the Colorado Springs Guidelines regarding gender language.[36] The translation is peppered throughout by explanatory footnotes, such as alternative translations, explanation of Greek and Hebrew terms, various other explanatory notes about culture or translations, and some technical translation notes.[37] Though the ESV has only been in print for a little over 20 years, it is fast becoming one of the most popular Bible translations and appears to be becoming the best-selling formal equivalence Bible translation.[38] The growth of the translation in general has been bolstered by the popularity of the ESV Study Bible, and it has proved especially popular amongst those of a more Reformed theological persuasion.

Christian Standard Bible (2004)

The CSB is a revision of the Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB) of 2004. The Southern Baptist Convention once used the NIV in much of its curriculum, but the cost of royalties as well as the inclusive-language controversy drove the publishers toward producing an alternative translation. Published by Holman Bible Publishers, that alternative was the HCSB, a translation that is slightly more formal than the NIV, but one that may still be considered a mediating translation. In 2016, a new revision was announced. The revision, completed in 2017, dropped "Holman" from the name and became known as simply the Christian Standard Bible. The primary change between the HCSB and the CSB is the CSB removed some of the strange decisions that were found in the HCSB, such as using "Messiah" in places in the New Testament rather than "Christ" or the inconsistent practice of sometimes rendering the divine name as "Yahweh" instead of "LORD" in the Old Testament. It retains much of the strength of the HSCB and polishes the translation up a bit.[39] Although the CSB is a very young translation, it is one that is gaining in popularity and may see increasing usage in the future, particularly given its place as a translation very close in style to the NIV.

Berean Standard Bible (2016)

The BSB is not a major translation by any means, but I highlight it because I chose to use it as the primary translation in this book. The BSB is a completely fresh translation, published by Bible Hub in 2016. The translation was produced by biblical scholars in an open process, meaning public comments could be made and considered by the committee. It was originally released as the Berean Study Bible, but it was rebranded as the Berean Standard Bible due to the translation not truly being a study Bible and the resulting confusion over the name.

The BSB is marketed as produced in four tiers: an interlinear translation (tier 1), a literal translation (tier 2), a modern English translation (tier 3), and an emphasized translation (tier 4), this last tier not yet released as of the time of writing this chapter. In truth, the tiered approach is a bit of a gimmick, though it can be helpful for study if used properly. The actual BSB translation (tier 3) is similar to the NIV and CSB, falling perhaps a bit more on the formal end of the spectrum. A version of the BSB, known as the Majority Standard Bible, is also in its first draft, which is translated according to the Robinson-Pierpont Byzantine Majority Text rather than the critical text of the NA/UBS texts. Most notably, and the reason I chose to use this translation for my book, it was released into the public domain in April of 2023. Most modern translations are under copyright, meaning that they cannot be freely shared and reproduced. The BSB was released

to the public domain because "The Scriptures belonged to the churches and were meant to be examined, copied, and distributed" and the translation is "intended to be offered freely in websites, apps, software, and various text and audio formats."[40] I view this move as a positive development and pray that we will see more Bible translations move to a freely shareable model in the future.[41]

Why So Many Translations?

Given this short list—compared to the total number of English translations now in existence—I have almost certainly skipped a translation that you as the reader are curious about, appreciate, or regularly use. This is not even close to an exhaustive list, but reflects what are, in my judgement, the most noteworthy translations at present and nothing more.

There is now a vast number of Bible translations in the English language, perhaps even more than meets the eye. In a sense, each revision is a slightly different Bible translation. The 1984 NIV does not read the same as the 2011 NIV, while the 2020 NASB will be different from the 1977 NASB. In my own estimation, Bible translations have been revised and produced far more often than needed, such that we have more English translations than we know what to do with. And it is this over-proliferation that I believe causes the text of Scripture to appear unstable to many people. The base text of the Hebrew and Greek is stable, but with so many different Bible translations produced with varying translation approaches, it can appear to the uninformed that the Bible is always changing. Hence the need for Christians to understand what causes the differences they see in Bible translations.

The explosion of translations and the existence of many competing Bible translations has probably caused you to ask at one point in time, "Why are there so many English Bible translations?" The answer to that question has many answers. We should acknowledge up front that money is definitely a factor; the Bible is a bestseller, after all, and most modern translations carry a copyright that prevent them from being freely reproduced by others. The financial motivation is front and center in the production of the HCSB where its commissioning was partially a cost-saving measure to avoid paying royalties. But this does not mean that modern translations are simply cash grabs; most, if not all, are borne out of a desire to produce a translation that serves the body of Christ in a particular way. The English language has shifted over the years, and so revisions are called for to preserve the translation legacy and bring it up to date in the present. Perhaps there are new textual discoveries that are worth incorporating into a new translation. There are also differences in translation philosophy, lending to the desire to try to express the words of Scripture in what some see as a clearer manner. The

ultimate aim of most of the translators is to communicate the Word of God to the body of Christ. While we may all disagree on how well that is accomplished, we should recognize that this is largely the driving motive.

Conclusion

We sit in a very unique time in history today. Just a hundred and fifty years ago, the translation variety that exists today was probably unimaginable. The KJV was still the primary and common translation of the land. When someone quoted the Bible, there was never a question of what translation they were quoting from; everyone knew what the Bible sounded like. A common question we hear (or ask) today is, "Which translation should I read?" Or, "Which translation is the best?" What was once a given is no longer a given. We have to make choices about Bible translations that our great-grandparents really did not have to make. And as has consistently happened throughout the history of Bible translations, the production of English Bibles in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has been accompanied by much controversy. Some of it is worthwhile, while other parts are very much overblown. The reality is that, despite all the controversy and loss of a common standard, we possess a wealth of riches in Bible translations. For readers who do not know Greek or Hebrew, they are no longer confined to a single translation, but can benefit from the insights that consulting multiple translations might bring. We are no longer left with only reading the Bible in language that is archaic but have translations that are in the language we use today. Whatever English Bible translation you use, give thanks to God for your access to it, and, rather than lamenting the diversity, recognize it for the blessing that it is that we have such widespread access to the Word of God in our own language.

Further Reading

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Kubo, Sakae and Walter Specht. *So Many Versions? Twentieth-Century English Versions of the Bible.* 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983.

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20.
Conclusion

For many of us, how we came to have the Bible may have been a history shrouded in mystery. Thinking about how this leather-bound English Bible came to be in the form we know it today may have been akin to sacrilege. Asking "how did we get the Bible?" may have been like asking "who made God?" Yet the Bible does have a history. It may be a complicated one, it may be a story with twists and turns, controversies, debates, scribes, monks, manuscripts, translators, martyrs, and a whole host of factors that are simply lost to history, but it is a history nonetheless. And it is a history that begins with God's speech. God spoke, and his words were written down, copied, canonized, and translated so that we can have access to them today in English.

We have really only scratched the surface on the full story of how we came to have the Bible in this book; there are more depths to be plumbed, and I myself am still learning just how deep they go. Even though this book is not comprehensive, it is my prayer that it will help you to appreciate the process by which we came to have the Bible, as well as equip you to recognize sensationalism, poor argumentation, and outright misinformation. The next time you hear someone say that Constantine created the canon at the Council of Nicaea, I hope you will be equipped to explain why this is not so nor could it be so. The next time you hear someone say that Christians did not have a Bible for their first three hundred years, I hope that you will point to the core canon of Scripture in early Christianity. The next time you hear that the Bible is just a copy of copy of copies,

I hope you will be able to explain the faithful transmission of the text. The next time you hear arguments over which Bible translation is the best, I pray that you will be equipped to judiciously evaluate why translations differ. And the next time you hear someone say that the Bible is just the product of political machinations, I hope that your trust in the Bible is strengthened by knowing the actual history of how it came to be. If you have been better equipped in your Christian walk and for the work of ministry in your local church, then my goal has been accomplished.

Having just finished a book about how we have come to have the Bible, the next time you read your Bible, give thanks to the Lord that he is so good and so kind as to give us free access to his words. Give praise to him for guiding the church to gather his words into a single collection. Glorify him that his message is not corrupted by the errors of men. And most of all, give praise to God that he chose to reveal himself to us and to make himself known through his written revelation. To God be the glory.

Further Reading

Grudem, Wayne, C., John Collins, and Thomas R. Schreiner, eds. *Understanding Scripture: An Overview of the Bible's Origin, Reliability, and Meaning*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012.

Meade, John D. and Peter J. Gurry. *Scribes and Scripture: The Amazing Story of How We Got the Bible*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022.

Lightfoot, Neil R. *How We Got the Bible*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: BakerBooks, 2003.

Reeves, Ryan M. and Charles E. Hill. *Know How We Got Our Bible*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018.

Appendices

Appendix A
Glossary of Figures from Church History

Ambrose of Milan (c. 339 – 397) — Became the bishop of Milan by popular demand. He was an influential figure in his day and is remembered for demanding public penance from Emperor Theodosius. Played a role in Augustine's conversion.

Andrew of Caesarea (563 – 614) — Bishop of Caesarea. Best known for his commentary on Revelation, the earliest known. Preserves some sayings of Papias in the commentary.

Aristides of Athens (active c. 120 – 140) — An early Christian apologist who delivered an apology to the Roman emperor Hadrian. His apology is likely the earliest surviving Christian apology.

Athanasius of Alexandria (c. 296 – 373) — Bishop of Alexandria from 328 until his death. Present at the Council of Nicaea (325) as a young man. The most prolific defender of the deity of Christ against the Arians in the aftermath of Nicaea and experienced multiple exiles for his faith.

Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430) — Bishop of Hippo in what is now modern-day Tunisia. He is likely the most influential theologian of the Western Church. A massively prolific author, he is best known for his *Confessions* and his *City of God*. Greatly influenced the Reformers.

Cerinthus (active c. 50–100) — An early Gnostic teacher who was likely a contemporary of the apostle John. Irenaeus indicates that John wrote to refute the teachings of Cerinthus.

Clement of Alexandria (c. 150 – c. 215) — Christian theologian who taught at the catechetical school in Alexandria. Greatly influenced by Greek philosophy, he sought to synthesize it with Christianity. Commented on many canonical books and knew and quoted many non-canonical books.

Clement of Rome (c. 35 – c. 100) – One of the first bishops of Rome. The late first-century letter from the Roman church to the Corinthian church known as 1 Clement is attributed to him.

Cyprian of Carthage (c. 210 – 258) — Bishop of Carthage. Known for his role in the controversy over those who lapsed during the Decian persecution and the Novatian schism. Died as a martyr during the reign of Valerian.

Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 313 – 386) – Bishop of Jerusalem. Best known for his catechetical lectures, which were intended to introduce the faith to new believers.

Dionysius of Alexandria (died 264) — Bishop of Alexandria. Involved in the Novatian schism. Influenced Eusebius's views that the apostle John is not the author of Revelation.

Gaius of Rome (active c. 200) — A little-known presbyter of Rome who may have played a role in doubts about Revelation.

Gregory of Nazianzus (c. 329 – 390) — Also known by the title "the Theologian," Gregory is one of the three Cappadocian Fathers. He was very influential in the formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 260 – 339) – Bishop of Caesarea and the father of church history. Eusebius wrote the first church history (*Ecclesiastical History*), which is the single most important source for early Christianity, as it preserves much that would be lost otherwise. Also known for writing the *Life of Constantine*.

Hippolytus of Rome (c. 170 – c. 235) — One of the major Christian heresiologists, Hippolytus's best-known work is his *Refutation of all Heresies*. He is also remembered as an antipope due to his opposition to Pope Zephryinus's alleged modalism and presented himself as an alternate bishop of Rome.

Ignatius of Antioch (died c. 108–117) — Bishop of Antioch. Known for his seven letters written while on the road to martyrdom.

Jerome (c. 342 – 420) — Probably the greatest scholar of his day, Jerome is responsible for the Latin translation commonly known as the Vulgate.

Justin Martyr (c. 100 – c. 165) — One of the early Christian apologists. Two apologies are extant, in addition to his *Dialogue with Tyrpho*. He died as a martyr in Rome.

Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130 – c. 202) — Bishop of Lyons in modern-day France. A follower of Polycarp in his younger days. Best known for his work *Against Heresies*. Important witness to the state of the canon at the end of the second century and for his anti-heretical writings.

Marcion of Sinope (c. 85 – c. 160) — An early Christian heretic known for his anti-Jewish and dualistic theology. He created his own canon of an edited Gospel of Luke and ten of Paul's epistles.

Melito of Sardis (died c. 180) — Bishop of Sardis. Most of his writings have been lost, though some are preserved in Eusebius. He is an important witness to the shape of the Old Testament canon in the second century.

Origen of Alexandria (c. 184 – c.253) — Probably the greatest scholar of the third century. His work ranged across theology, apologies, and textual scholar-

ship. He is known for his massive Hexapla. Many of his views were later condemned, as he was given to much speculation.

Papias of Hierapolis (c. 60 – c. 130) — An ancient man, follower of John, and companion of Polycarp. He collected traditions of the apostles and provides us the earliest direct testimony on the authorship of the Gospels.

Polycarp of Smyrna (69 – 155) — Bishop of Smyrna. Was a follower of John in his younger days and mentor to Irenaeus. He forms an important link to the apostolic age. The account of his martyrdom as an old man is preserved in The Martyrdom of Polycarp.

Rufinus (345 – 411) — A monk in the Western church. His greatest contribution has been the translation of many works from Greek to Latin, especially of Origen, whose writings largely survive in Rufinus's Latin translations.

Sozomen (c. 400 – c. 450) — A later church historian whose writings bring the history of the church into the fifth century.

Tatian (c. 120 – c. 180) — A disciple of Justin, he was later excommunicated for his ascetic views and may have founded the Encratites. He is responsible for the *Diatessaron*, a harmony of the four Gospels which proved especially popular among Syriac-speaking Christians.

Tertullian (c. 155 AD – c. 220) — An early Christian apologist from Carthage, known as the father of Latin Christianity. Credited with introducing the word *trinitas* into the Latin vocabulary. Converted to the Montanist sect later in life.

Theophilus of Antioch (died c. 185) — Bishop of Antioch. An influential early theologian, he is the earliest writer to use the word "Trinity."

Valentinus (c. 100 – c. 180) — The founder of Valentinian Gnosticism.

Appendix B
Citations Concerning the Canon

These citations are intended to serve as a handy reference guide for those looking to dig into the primary sources we use to establish the history of the canon. This is not a comprehensive list by any means, but one to help you in locating notable passages for further research. For the references to specific New Testament books, I have included direct quotations and those that may be considered to be allusions, in addition to statements about the books. The citations as a whole date to no later than the fifth century AD, except when a later figure refers to an earlier figure. I have arranged them in roughly chronological order.

Old Testament Canon Lists

Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.8.
Babylonian Talmud, *Baba Bathra* 14b.
The Bryennios List.
Melito of Sardis, in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 4.26.13–14.
Origen of Alexandria, in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.25.1–2.
Epiphanius of Salamis, *Panarion* 8.6.1–4.
Epiphanius of Salamis, *De mensuris et ponderibus* 4–5; 22–23.
Hilary of Poitiers, *Instructio Psalmorum* 15.
Jerome, *Prologus Galeatus.*
Jerome, *Epistle 107* 12.

Old Testament Canon Allusions

Sirach 1:1.
2 Maccabees 2:14–15.
2 Maccabees 15:9.
Philo, *On the Contemplative Life* 25.
Luke 11:50–51.
4 Esdras 14:44–48.

New Testament Canon Lists

The Muratorian Fragment.
Origen, *Homily on Joshua* 7.1.
Origen, *Homily on Genesis* 13.2.
Origen, cited in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.25.3–14.
Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.25.1–7.

Complete Canon Lists

Athanasius of Alexandria, *39th Festal Letter*.
Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lecture* 4.33–36.
Council of Laodicea, Canon 59.
Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine 2.8.*
Apostolic Canons 85.
Gregory of Nazianzus, *Carmina Theologica, Book I, Section I, Carmen XII.*
Amphilochius of Iconium, *Iambi ad Seleucum* 251–320.
Epiphanius of Salamis, *Panarion* 76.22.5.
Canon List in Codex Claromontanus.
The Mommsen Catalogue.
Breviarum Hipponense 36 (Third Council of Carthage, Canon 24).
Jerome, *Epistle 53* (*To Paulinus*) 8–9.
The Doctrine of Addai.
Rufinus of Aquileia, *Commentary on the Apostles' Creed.*
Pope Innocent I, Epistle 6 *ad Exsuperium Tolosanum*.
St. Catherine's Monastery Syriac MS 10.

References to the Gospels

Didache 8.2; 9.5.
Epistle of Barnabas 5.9; 7.3.
Papias of Hierapolis, in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.15–16.
Polycarp of Smyrna, *Epistle to the Philippians* 2.3.
2 Clement 4.2; 6.1–2.

Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans* 3.1–2.
Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 66–67.
Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 103; 106.
Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3.1.1; 3.11.8–9.
Theophilus of Antioch, *To Autolycus* 2.13; 2.22; 3.2.
Clement of Alexandria, in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.14.2–17.
Clement of Alexandria, in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.14.5–7.
Hippolytus of Rome, *Commentary on Daniel* 1.17.
Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 4.2.
Origen, *Homilies on Luke, Homily* 1.2.
Cyprian of Carthage, *Epistle 72* 10.

References to Acts

Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3.14.1–3.15.1.
Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 5.12.
Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 5.1–2.

References to the Pauline Epistles

2 Peter 3:15–16.
1 Clement 47.1–3.
Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Ephesians* 12.2.
Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 5.1–21.
Gaius of Rome, summarized in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.20.3.
Clement of Alexandria, cited in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.14.2–4.
Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.3.5.

References to Hebrews

1 Clement 17.1, 5; 19.2; 27.2; 36.2–5.
Polycarp of Smyrna, *Epistle to the Philippians* 6.3; 12.2.
Irenaeus of Lyons, summarized in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.26.1.
Gaius of Rome, summarized in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.20.3.
Tertullian, *On Modesty* 20.
Origen, cited in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.25.11–14.
Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.3.5.

References to the Catholic Epistles:

Papias of Hierapolis, summarized in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.16.
Polycarp of Smyrna, *Epistle to the Philippians* 7.1.
Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3.16.5.

Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 5.7.2.
Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.3.1.

References to Revelation:

Papias of Hierapolis, summarized in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.11–13.
Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 81.
Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 4.5.
Dionysius of Alexandria, cited in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 7.25.1–27.
Andrew of Caesarea, *Commentary on the Apocalypse* 12.34.

Appendix C
Notable Biblical Manuscripts

As an aid to reading the manuscript titles, here is a breakdown of how the manuscripts are labeled. This is only a small sampling of manuscripts; these are only listed to give you an idea of what some of the more notable manuscripts are.

Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) — Broken down into cave number, location, and number or name. For example, 1QIsa[a] may be broken down as follows: 1 = Cave 1; Q = Qumran; Isa = Isaiah; [a] = the first Isaiah scroll found in the cave.

Papyrus Manuscripts — New Testament papyrus manuscripts are symbolized by the letter P or a Gothic 𝔓. They are numbered according to the order they were discovered and catalogued, not by chronological date, e.g., P52 is the 52nd papyrus manuscript catalogued.

Majuscule Manuscripts — Majuscule refers to a type of script consisting of all capital letters. Manuscripts starting with a 0 are majuscules, e.g., 02 or 0304. The more significant manuscripts can also be referred to by letters, such as ℵ (*aleph*) or A. I include both the number and letter for clarity. These are typically earlier manuscripts.

Minuscule Manuscripts — Minuscule refers to a cursive-type script consisting of both lowercase and capital letters. Manuscripts starting with a number other than 0 are minuscules. "GA" stands for the Gregory-Aland numbering system. These are typically later manuscripts.

Manuscript	**Notes**
Nash Papyrus	Dating to around 150–100 BC, this manuscript was once the oldest OT manuscript in existence. It is very fragmentary, only containing Ex. 20:2–17; Deut. 5:6–21.
Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa[a])	Perhaps the best-known manuscript from among the Dead Sea Scrolls. It dates to about the 2nd century BC. Approximately 54 feet in length, it is incredibly well preserved and contains a text that mostly accords with the MT, with some slight differences.
1QIsa[b]	A more fragmentary text of Isaiah preserved among the Dead Sea Scrolls. It dates to about the 1st century AD and preserves a proto-Masoretic Text type.
P52	Commonly recognized as the earliest NT manuscript; likely early 2nd century. It is a credit card sized fragment containing parts of John 18:31–33 on one side and 18:37–38 on the other.
P45	A 3rd-century manuscript containing portions of all four Gospels and Acts. The earliest extant example of all four Gospels being collected in a single manuscript.
P46	The earliest collection of Paul's epistles (including Hebrews). Lacks 2 Thessalonians, Philemon, and the pastoral epistles. Dates to the 3rd century.
P66	Nearly complete manuscript of the Gospel of John, dating to the late 2nd or early 3rd century
P75	A 3rd-century manuscript containing significant portions of Luke and John. Its text very closely agrees with B.
P72	Contains 1 Peter, 2 Peter, and Jude, along with several apocryphal works and other Christian writings (e.g., Nativity of Mary, Apology of Phileas). Dates to the late 3rd/early 4th century.
Codex Siniaticus (01/א)	Dates to the 4th century. Originally contained the complete OT (LXX) and NT. Now lacking some of the OT. One of the oldest complete Bibles still extant. Also contains Epistle of Barnabas and Shepherd of Hermas after the NT.

Manuscript	**Notes**
Codex Vaticanus (03/B)	Dates to the 4th century. Originally contained the complete OT (LXX) and NT. Lacking significant portions of the NT. Considered one of the most significant witnesses to the text of the NT.
Codex Washingtonianus (W/032)	From the 4th/5th century, contains the text of the Gospels. It is one of the more important witnesses to the text of the NT.
Codex Sinaiticus Syriacus	A 4th/5th-century Syriac manuscript of the Gospels. It is a palimpsest that was written over in the 7th century. It represents the Old Syriac tradition.
Codex Alexandrinus (02/A)	Complete Bible containing the OT (LXX) and NT from the 5th century; now lacking portions of the OT. The Gospels are an early witness to the so-called Byzantine text type.
Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus (04/C)	A 5th-century manuscript that once contained the entire OT (LXX) and NT. It is a palimpsest; its original text had been washed off and the manuscript was reused for treatises of Ephrem the Syrian. The surviving original text was deciphered by Constantin von Tischendorf in the 19th century.
Codex Bezae (05/D)	A 5th-century manuscript of the Gospels, written on facing pages with Greek on one side and Latin on the other. Considered one of the most eccentric manuscripts and is the primary Greek witness to the so-called Western text type.
Quedlinburg Itala fragment	The oldest extant illustrated biblical manuscript. Dates to the 5th century. Contains parts of 1 Samuel and is representative of the Old Latin tradition.
British Library, Add MS 14470	One of the earliest manuscripts of the Syriac Peshitta, dating to the 5th/6th century. Contains 22 books of the NT, which would have been considered a complete NT for the Syriac-speaking church at the time.
Codex Amiatinus	The earliest extant complete Latin Vulgate. Dates to the 8th century.
GA 461	The earliest extant minuscule manuscript. Contains the Gospels. It can be dated to 835 based on its colophon. Copied by a monk named Nicolaus.

Manuscript	**Notes**
Cairo Codex of the Prophets	Its colophon dates it to c. 895. Contains the text of the Prophets. One of the earlier extant Masoretic manuscripts.
Petersburg Codex of the Prophets	The colophon dates the manuscript to 916. Contains the text of the Prophets. Notable for containing the Babylonian vowel pointings as opposed to the Tiberian.
Aleppo Codex	Dates to c. 920–930. It was the oldest complete Hebrew OT until portions of it were lost after the 1947 anti-Jewish riots in Aleppo.
GA 1739	Copied by a scribe named Ephraim in the mid-10th century. Contains Acts, Pauline Epistles, and Catholic Epistles. Preserves an early text that is similar to P46 and B.
Leningrad Codex	Can be reasonably dated to 1008 AD. It is now the oldest extant complete OT manuscript in Hebrew.
GA 304	Dated to the 12th century. It is one of the few Greek manuscripts to lack the longer ending of Mark.
Codex Gigas	A 13th-century Latin manuscript of the OT and NT that has the reputation of being the largest manuscript from the Middle Ages. Each page is about 36 inches tall and 20 inches wide, and the whole manuscript weighs about 165 pounds.

Appendix D
Timeline of English Bible Translations

c. 735	Bede completes a translation of the Gospel of John into Old English on his deathbed.
c. 875	Alfred commissions translations of portions of the Old Testament and personally translated 50 of the psalms.
c. 990	The four Gospels are translated into Old English in the Wessex Gospels.
c.1384	Complete Wycliffe Bible first published.
1395	John Purvey's revision of the Wycliffe Bible.
1525	William Tyndale publishes the New Testament.
1534	Tyndale publishes the revision of the New Testament.
1535	The Coverdale Bible is published.
1536	Tyndale Martyred
1537	The Matthew Bible is published.
1539	The Great Bible published and authorized for use in the Church of England.
1557	William Whittingham publishes the New Testament for the Geneva Bible.
1560	The complete Geneva Bible is published.
1568	The Bishops' Bible is published.
1582	The Rheims New Testament is published.

1604	King James commissions a new Bible translation.
1609	The Douay Old Testament is published, completing the Douay-Rheims Bible.
1611	The King James Version (KJV) published.
1660	The monarchy restored; the Geneva Bible fades away in aftermath.
1768	Edward Harwood publishes his New Testament.
1769	Benjamin Blayney publishes the Oxford Standard Edition of the KJV.
1808	Charles Thomson publishes his translation of the Bible.
1833	Noah Webster's revision of the KJV is published.
1862	Robert Young publishes his Young's Literal Translation.
1876	Julia Smith publishes her own translation of the Bible.
1881	The New Testament for the Revised Version (RV) is published.
1885	The Old Testament is completed and the full RV is published.
1890	John Nelson Darby publishes his translation of the Bible.
1901	The American Standard Version (ASV) is published.
1903	Richard Weymouth's New Testament in Modern Speech is published.
1926	The complete Moffat Translation of the Bible is published.
1950	The New World Translation (NWT) is published.
1952	The Revised Standard Version (RSV) is published.
1965	The Amplified Bible (AMP) is published.
1970	The New English Bible (NEB) is published.
1971	The complete New American Standard Bible (NASB) and The Living Bible (TLB) are published.
1976	The Good News Bible (GNB) is published.
1978	The complete New International Version (NIV) is published.
1982	The complete New King James Version (NKJV) is published.
1985	The New Jerusalem Bible (NJB) is published
1989	The New Revised Standard Bible (NRSV) is published.
1996	The New Living Translation (NLT) is published.
2001	New English Translation (NET) and English Standard Version (ESV) published.
2002	The Message (MSG) published.

2004	The Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB) is published
2005	Today's New International Version (TNIV) is published.
2012	The Lexham English Bible (LEB) is published.
2014	The Modern English Version (MEV) is published.
2016	The Berean Standard Bible (BSB) is published under the name of the Berean Study Bible.
2017	The Christian Standard Bible (CSB) is published.
2021	The Legacy Standard Bible (LSB) is published.
2023	The BSB is released to the public domain.

Notes

Preface

1. I first became acquainted with Andy Stanley's argument through his sermon "The Bible Told Me So." I had not realized for several years that he put the same claims in print. I have Peter Gurry and John Meade to thank for alerting me to the fact that he published the same argument. See how they address his statement in John D. Meade and Peter J. Gurry, *Scribes and Scripture: The Amazing Story of How We Got the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 148–149.

2. Andy Stanley, *Irresistible: Reclaiming the New That Jesus Unleashed for the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 301.

3. Stanley, *Irresistible,* 303. Ellipses original.

4. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3.1.1. Emphasis mine.

5. I have intentionally not given specific examples here, though these are all examples I have personally heard or read multiple times at one point or another.

6. Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2017); Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007); William D. Mounce, *Why I Trust the Bible: Answers to Real Questions and Doubts People Have about the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021); Peter J. Williams, *Can We Trust the Gospels?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018); K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003); James K. Hoffmeier and Dennis R. Magary, eds., *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith? A Critical Appraisal of Modern and Postmodern Approaches to Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012); Although parts are a bit dated, also see F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* 6th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988).

1. The Word of God and of Men

1. C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), 264.

2. For an excellent discussion of the doctrine of Scripture that I partly draw on here, see Timothy Ward, *Words of Life: Scripture as the Living and Active Word of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), especially chapters 2 and 3.

3. Ward, *Words of Life*, 42.

2. The Authors of the Old Testament

1. See Josh. 8:31–32; 22:5; 23:6; 1 Kings 2:3; 2 Kings 14:6; 21:8; 23:25 2 Chron. 23:18; 24:6; 25:4; 30:16; 34:14; 35:12; Ezra 3:2; 6:18; 7:6 Neh. 8:1; 13:1; Dan 9:11–13; Mal. 4:4.

2. *Baba Bathra* 14b–15a; Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.8.

3. See Matt. 8:4; 19:8; Mark 1:44; 7:10; 10:2–5; 12:26–27; Luke 5:14; 20:37–38; 24:44; John 5:45–47; 7:19–23.

4. For a brief overview of issues concerning the Documentary Hypothesis, see David W. Baker, "Source Criticism," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch,* eds. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 798–806. See also Duane A. Garrett, *Rethinking Genesis: The Sources and Authorship of the First Book of the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1991), 13–18 and Tremper Longman III and Raymond B. Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 40–51.

5. You can find this proposed as established fact in books like Karen Armstrong, *The Bible: A Biography* (New York: Grove Press, 2007) and John Barton, *A History of the Bible: The Story of the World's Most Influential Book* (Viking: 2019), 48–55. The Documentary Hypothesis has largely fallen out of favor in Europe but continues to be propounded in America. As Stephen Chapman has commented on its continued staying force, "The Documentary Hypothesis maintains its dominance in numerous English-language textbooks and course lectures because, as one colleague who teaches in the Bible Belt said to me, 'It's such an effective way to convince students they can't be fundamentalists.'" Stephen B. Chapman, "The Pentateuch as Canon," in *Canon Formation: Tracing the Role of Sub-Collections in the Biblical Canon*, eds. W. Edward Glenny and Darian R. Lockett (London: T&T Clark, 2023),103.

6. For example, see Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987), xxxv–xlii and Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 35.

7. See Garrett, *Rethinking Genesis*, 13–87; K. A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and the Old Testament* (Chicago: InterVarsity Press, 1966).

8. K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003), 492.

9. See the arguments in Joshua S. Berman, *Inconsistency in the Torah: Ancient Literary Convention and the Limits of Source Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 17–103.

10. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, 494–497.

11. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient*, 23.

12. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient*, 23.

13. For example, Gen. 12:6 is a reference to Caananites in retrospect; Gen. 21:32–34 the Philistines are not in land until later; Num. 21:14 quotes from the Book of the Wars of the Lord, a historical document which may postdate Moses; Deut. 3:9–11 are parenthetical editorial comments. Some of the various

uses of "until this day" may suggest retrospective comments (e.g., Gen. 26:33; Gen. 32:32).

14. See S. L. Richter, "Deuteronomistic History," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books,* eds. Bill T. Arnold and H. G. M. Williamson (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2005), 219–230.

15. *Baba Bathra* 14b.

16. For example, see John Goldingay, *Psalms: Volume 1: Psalms 1–41* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 25–30.

17. D. A. Brueggeman, "Psalms 4: Titles," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry, and Writings*, eds. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 615.

18. For other examples, see Ps. 16 in Acts 2:25–31; Ps. 110 in Acts 2:34–35; Ps. 32 in Rom. 4:6–8; Ps. 69 in Rom. 11:9–10; Ps. 95 in Heb. 4:7.

19. Goldingay, *Psalms 1–41*, 28.

20. For further discussion on the various complexities around Ecclesiastes, see Richard P. Belcher, Jr., "Ecclesiastes," in *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament: The Gospel Promised,* eds. Miles V. Van Pelt (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016).

3. The Authors of the New Testament

1. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.1; compare Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.33.4.

2. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.3–4.

3. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.15–16. This translation from "Fragments of Papias" in *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, 3rd ed., ed. and trans. Michael W. Holmes (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 739–741.

4. That is not to say that no other eyewitnesses would have played any role, but that Peter's would have been decisive. For further discussion of both Papias's testimony and Peter's role in Mark's Gospel, see Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2017), 12–38, 155–182.

5. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3.1.1.

6. For example, Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 42. See also Darrell L. Bock and Daniel B. Wallace, *Dethroning Jesus: Exposing Popular Culture's Quest to Unseat the Biblical Christ* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 127.

7. Simon Gathercole, "The Alleged Anonymity of the Canonical Gospels." *Journal of Theological Studies* 69, no. 2 (October 2018): 447–76; Martin Hengel, *The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Collection and Origin of the Canonical Gospels*, trans. John Bowden (Harrisburg: T&T Clark, 2000), 48–56.

8. Manuscripts that bear the titles: P4, P66, P75, Codex Sinaiticus, Codex Vaticanus. For a survey of the Gospel titles, see Simon J. Gathercole, "The Titles of the Gospels in the Earliest New Testament Manuscripts," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenchaft* 104, no. 1 (January, 2013): 33–76.

9. For further reading on the Synoptic Problem, see Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 37–47.

10. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3.14.1.

11. See also the "we" statements in Acts 16:11–16; 20:5–15; 21:1–18; 27:1–37; 28:1-16

12. Col. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:11; Phlm. 1:24.

13. 1 Cor. 16:21; Col. 4:18; 2 Thes, Phlm. 19.

14. 1 Cor. 1:1.

15. 2 Cor. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 1 Thes. 1:1; 2 Thes 1:1; Phlm. 1:1.

16. 1 Thes. 1:1; 2 Thes 1:1.

17. For an example of how the pastoral epistles are treated, see Bart D. Erhman, *Forged:Writing in the Name of God—Why the Bible's Authors Are Not Who We Think They Are* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 93–105.

18. William B. Barcley, "Introduction to the Pastoral Epistles," in *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament: The Gospel Realized*, ed. Michael J. Kruger (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 350–352.

19. N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God,* Book I, Parts I and II (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 60.

20. For an extensive defense of Pauline authorship of all of the disputed letters, see the chapters on each epistle in Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction,* 4th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990).

21. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.14.2–3.

22. Tertullian, *On Modesty* 20.

23. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History,* 6.25.11–14.

24. Cited in Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History,* 6.15.12, 14.

25. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, 2.22.5; 3.33.4; 5.30.3.

26. Clement of Alexandria, *Who Is the Rich Man?* 42.

27. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.25.3.

28. Whether a John the Elder ever existed is an open question. His existence largely depends on the ambiguity of who "the elder" and the "presbyter John" are to be identified with in Papias's comments. See Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.4–7.

29. Charles E. Hill, *The Johannine Corpus in the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 471.

30. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.23.25.

31.This was Clement of Alexandria's opinion in *Comments on the Epistle of Jude*.

32. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 7.25.7.

33. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 81.

34. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 4.20.11.

35. Hippolytus of Rome, *On Christ and Antichrist* 36, 50

36. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.23.1–6.

37. Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 3.25.

4. Canon Defined

1. If you are not familiar with the circumstances of the analogy, the background is when Disney bought the Star Wars franchise in 2012. After acquiring the franchise, Disney declared in 2014 that the various books and stories outside the movies—termed the *Expanded Universe*—were non-canonical. This allowed Disney to proceed in its own narrative directions. The contrast is

that the biblical canon is not something that is subject to change based on the whims of a powerful organization, unlike the canon of Star Wars.

2. I believe I derived this terminology from F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1988), 123.

3. Michael J. Kruger, *The Question of Canon: Challenging the Status Quo in the New Testament Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 27–46.

4. Kruger, *The Question of Canon*, 29.

5. Kruger, *The Question of Canon*, 34–35.

6. Kruger, *The Question of Canon*, 40.

5. The Jewish Canon of the Old Testament

1. *Baba Bathra* 14b.

2. Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.8.

3. F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1988), 33.

4. John D. Meade and Peter J. Gurry, *Scribes and Scripture: The Amazing Story of How We Got the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 117.

5. Philo of Alexandria, *On the Contemplative Life* 25. The Therapeutae were an ascetic Jewish sect, for which *On the Contemplative Life* is a primary source of information about them.

6. For a detailed analysis of the canon of the different Jewish schools, see Roger Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1985), 86–91.

7. Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon*, 211–222.

8. For an overview, see Bruce Metzger, *An Introduction to the Apocrypha* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957), 151–173.

9. James C. VanderKam, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010), 48–49.

10. Peter W. Flint, *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013), 83–86.

11. Flint, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 95.

12. Apocrypha quotations drawn from the RSV.

13. Refer back to Chapter 2.

14. Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon*, 64.

15. Edmon L. Gallagher and John D. Meade, *The Biblical Canon Lists from Early Christianity: Texts and Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 70–78.

16. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 4.26.13–14. Language lightly updated.

17. Gallagher and Meade, *The Biblical Canon Lists from Early Christianity*, 78.

18. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.25.1–2.

19. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Festal Letter* 39.4.

20. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lecture* 4.35. Adapted from Gallagher and Meade, *The Biblical Canon Lists*, 114–115.

21. Jerome, *Prologus Galeatus*.

22. Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), 177.

23. Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.8.

6. The Apocrypha

1. Roman Catholics prefer the terminology of deuterocanonical books, that is, books constituting a second canon. Referring to them as the deuterocanonical books is more precise, as it avoids confusion over *apocryphal* books like the ones we see in Chapter 11. Nevertheless, because the term *Apocrypha* is generally more familiar to Protestants, I continue to use the term here.

2. Karen H. Jobes and Moisés Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2000) 36.

3. Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 31.

4. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 71–73.

5. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3.21.1–3.

6. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 1.22.

7. As Metropolitan Timothy (Kallistos) Ware writes, "When [the LXX] differs from the original Hebrew (which happens quite often), Orthodox believe that the changes in the Septuagint were made under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and are to be accepted as part of God's continuing revelation." Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church: An Introduction to Eastern Christianity,* 3rd ed. (Penguin Books, 2015), 194.

8. John D. Meade and Peter J. Gurry, *Scribes and Scripture: The Amazing Story of How We Got the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 130.

9. Origen, *Letter to Africanus* 13.

10. Bruce M. Metzger, *An Introduction to the Apocrypha* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957), 178.

11. Metzger, *An Introduction to the Apocrypha*, 179.

12. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* 2.8.

13. Metzger, *An Introduction to the Apocrypha*,178-179.

14. Jerome, *Prologue to the Books of Solomon*. Quoted in Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, 91-92.

15. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Festal Letter* 39.7.

16. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, 80.

17. Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Job* 19.34. Before drawing an application from 1 Macc. 6:46, Gregory comments, "we are not acting irregularly, if from the books, though not Canonical, yet brought out for the edifying of the Church, we bring forward testimony."

18. Bede, *Explanation of the Apocalypse* 1.4.8. He enumerates the books of the Old Testament by commenting that "the six wings of the four living creatures, which are twenty-four in number, intimate as many books of the Old Testament, by which the authority of the Evangelists is supported, and their truth proved."

19. John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* 4.17. He lists the books of the Old Testament as twenty-two, while he notes that the deuterocanonical books are "virtuous and noble, but are not counted nor were they placed in the ark."

20. Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 194.

21. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, 101.

22. Council of Trent, Session 4, "Concerning the Edition and Use of the Sacred Books, 8 April, 1546," in *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent: Original Text with English Translation*, trans. H. J. Schroeder (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book Co., 1960), 18.

23. Metzger, *An Introduction to the Apocrypha*, 180.

24. Cited in Meade and Gurry, *Scribes and Scripture*, 134.

25. Cited in William Whitaker, *A Disputation on Holy Scripture, Against the Papists, Especially Bellarmine and Stapleton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1849), 48. Translation lightly modernized.

26. In German, he introduced the Apocrypha with the simple sentence, *Das sind Bücher, so nicht der heiligen Schrift gleich gehalten, und doch nützlich und gut zu lesen sind.*

27. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture,* 112.

28. Metzger, *An Introduction to the Apocrypha*, 171.

29. James R. White, *The Roman Catholic Controversy: Catholics & Protestants—Do the Differences Still Matter?* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1996), 93.

30. White, *The Roman Catholic Controversy,* 93.

31. John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners; or, A Brief Relation of the Exceeding Mercy of God in Christ to His Poor Servant* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1993), 36.

32. See the argument for their acceptance of these books in James C. VanderKam, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2010), 192–193.

33. *Epistle of Barnabas* 16.5–6.

34. Tertullian, *On the Apparel of Women* 1.3.

35. This is the view of VanderKam, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today*, 193.

36. We find this in John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*, trans. John Owen (Edinburgh: The Calvin Translation Society, 1855), 442–443. See also Augustine's comments in *The City of God*, 15.23.

7. The Context for a New Canon

1. For example, John Knox has argued, "Marcion's canon served as the decisive occasion of its [the New Testament canon's] creation." *Marcion and the New Testament: An Essay in the Early History of the Canon* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942), 161.

2. Benjamin P. Laird, *Creating the Canon: Composition, Controversy, and the Authority of the New Testament* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2023), 224.

3. Laird, *Creating the Canon*, 228.

4. For a fuller handling of whether the authors of the New Testament were consciously writing Scripture, see Michael J. Kruger, *The Question of Canon: Challenging the Status Quo in the New Testament Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 119–154. I rely upon Kruger's presentation in what follows.

5. Kruger, *The Question of Canon*, 143–146.

6. Kruger, *The Question of Canon*, 131.

7. 1 Clement 45.2–3, in *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, 3rd ed., ed. and trans. Michael W. Holmes (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007).

8. 1 Clement 47.1–3.

9. 1 Clement 5.2.

10. 1 Clement 42.1–2.

11. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.3–4.

12. Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2017) 21–30.

13. Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Magnesians* 7.1.

14. Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Philadelphians* 9.1–2.

15. Polycarp of Smyrna, *Epistle to the Philippians* 6.3.

16. Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 60.

17. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.3.3; Irenaeus lists him as third in succession.

18. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.3.4.

19. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.20.5–6.

20. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.36.2.

21. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue With Trypho* 119.

22. Theophilus of Antioch, *To Autolycus* 3.12.

23. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3.1.1.

24. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3.5.1.

25. See F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1988), 255–269; see also Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament*, 251–266.

26. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, 123.

27. Michael J. Kruger, *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 184.

28. For more information about book distribution in the ancient world and in Christian circles, see Harry Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 82–143.

29. Larry W. Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2006), 96.

30. Gamble, *Books and Readers*, 74.

31. Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts*, 46–48. The numbers are not the most up to date, but they are still illustrative of the disparity between general and Christian usage of the codex.

32. Larry W. Hurtado, "The Earliest Evidence of an Emerging Christian Material and Visual Culture: The Codex, the Nomina Sacra and the Staurogram," in *Text and Artifact in the Religions of Mediterranean Antiquity: Essays in Honour of Peter Richardson*, eds. Stephen G. Wilson and Michel Desiardins (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2000), 272.

33. Gamble, *Books and Readers*, 58.

34. Gamble, *Books and Readers*, 78.

35. Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts*, 117–120.

8. The Formation of the Core Canon

1. Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (Corgi Press, 2004), 312–313.

2. Richard Dawkins, *Outgrowing God: A Beginner's Guide* (New York: Random House, 2019), 25–26.

3. Dawkins, *Outgrowing God*, 33.

4. Bart D. Ehrman, *The Lost Gospel of Judas Iscariot: A New Look at Betrayer and Betrayed* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006), 53.

5. Bart D. Ehrman, *Truth and Fiction in the* Da Vinci Code: *A Historian Reveals What We Really Know about Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and Constantine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 24.

6. Michael J. Kruger, *Christianity at the Crossroads: How the Second Century Shaped the Future of the Church* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2018), 211–215.

7. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3.11.8–9. Square brackets original.

8. Elaine Pagels, *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas* (New York: Random House, 2003), 111.

9. Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 67.

10. Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 66.

11. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 103.

12. Michael J. Kruger, *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 226.

13. Charles E. Hill, *Who Chose the Gospels? Probing the Great Gospel Conspiracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 133.

14. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 106.

15. Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 226.

16. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.15–16.

17. Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 55.

18. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.14.5–7.

19. Hippolytus of Rome, *Commentary on Daniel* 1.17.

20. Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 4.2.

21. Origen, *Homilies on Luke,* Homily 1.2.

22. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.25.3–6.

23. Cyprian of Carthage, *Epistle* 72.10.

24. Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 215.

25. *Epistle of Barnabas* 4.14.

26. See the text and analysis in Hill, *Who Chose the Gospels?* 179–182.

27. Polycarp of Smyrna, *Epistle to the Philippians* 2.3; 7.2.

28. See Charles E. Hill, *The Johannine Corpus in the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 416–420.

29. Origen, *Against Celsus* 2.27.

30. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3.11.7, 9.

31. Hill, *Who Chose the Gospels?* 229.

32. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3.14.1–3.15.1.

33. Muratorian Fragment 34–36. Text found in Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament,* 306.

34. Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 5.1–2.

35. 1 Clement 47.1–3.

36. For a closer look at 1 Clement's use of New Testament writings, see Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament*, 41–43. For an in depth review, see

Andrew F. Gregory, "1 Clement and the Writings That Later Formed the New Testament," in *The Reception of the New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers*, vol. 1, eds. Andrew F. Gregory and Christopher M. Tuckett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 129–157.

37. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament*, 42.

38. Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 214–215. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament*, 45, does not seem to think Galatians is known.

39. Ignatius, *Epistle to the Ephesians* 12.2.

40. Michael W. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, 3rd ed., ed. and trans. Michael W. Holmes (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 273.

41. Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 5.14, 21.

42. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.20.3.

43. 1 Clement 17.1, 5; 19.2; 27.2; 36.2–5.

44. Polycarp of Smyrna, *Epistle to the Philippians* 6.3; compare to Hebrews 12:28.

45. Polycarp of Smyrna, *Epistle to the Philippians* 12.2.

46. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.26.1. Irenaeus's work *On the Apostolic Preaching* has been recovered and perhaps shows influence from Hebrews in his discussion of the new covenant.

47. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.14.2–4.

48. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.25.13.

49. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.3.5.

50. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.20.3.

51. Tertullian, *On Modesty* 20.

52. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.25.11–14.

53. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.16.

54. Polycarp of Smyrna, *Epistle to the Philippians* 7.1; Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament*, 61–62.

55. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 5.7.2.

56. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3.16.5.

57. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament*, 131.

58. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.25.7–10.

59. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.12.

60. Andrew of Caesarea, *Commentary on the Apocalypse* 12.34, trans. Eugeniua Scarvelis Constantinou (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 142–143.

61. Andrew of Caesarea, *Commentary on the Apocalypse* Prologue, 53–54.

62. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 81.

63. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 4.14.2; 5.26.1.

64. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, 5.26.1–5.36.3.

65. Muratorian Fragment 71–72.

66. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 4.26.2.

67. Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 3.14; see also 3.25.

68. Hippolytus of Rome, *On Christ and Antichrist*, 36.

69. Hippolytus of Rome, *On Christ and Antichrist*, 48.

70. Origen, *Commentary on John* 2.4.

71. Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 138.

9. Filling Out the Canon

1. Charles E. Hill, "The Debate Over the Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon," *Westminster Theological Journal* 57:2 (Fall 1995): 437-452; Bruce M. Metzger in *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 191–194.

2. The Muratorian Fragment, as translated Metzger in *The Canon of the New Testament,* 305–307. All brackets are original.

3. Origen, *Homily on Joshua* 7.1, in Origen, *Homilies on Joshua*, ed. Cynthia White, trans Barbara J. Bruce, vol. 105, *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University Press of America, 2002), 74–75. Bracketed inclusion of Revelation as cited in Michael J. Kruger, "Origen's List of New Testament Books in *Homiliae in Josuam* 7.1: A Fresh Look," in *Mark, Manuscripts, and Monotheism: Essays in Honor of Larry W. Hurtado*, eds. Chris Keith and Dieter T. Roth (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 108.

4. Edmon L. Gallagher, "Origen *Via* Rufinus on the New Testament Canon." *New Testament Studies* 62, no. 3 (07, 2016): 461-76; Kruger, "Origen's List of New Testament Books," 99–117.

5. Origen, *Homily on Genesis* 13.2.

6. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.25.3–14. Language lightly updated.

7. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.25.1–5.

8. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament*, 205.

9. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lecture* 4.36.

10. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Festal Letter* 39.5–6.

11. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Carmina Theologica, Book I, Section I, Carmen XII.*

12. Augustine of Hippo, *On Christian Doctrine* 2.8.13.

13. Augustine of Hippo, *On Christian Doctrine* 2.8.12.

14. Third Council of Carthage, Canon 24. Text as found in Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament*, 315.

15. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament*, 238.

16. This is also unique for including its own writings in the canon list.

17. Edmon L. Gallagher and John D. Meade, *The Biblical Canon Lists from Early Christianity: Texts and Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 236–243.

18. F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1988), 255–269; see also Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament*, 215.

19. See the statements from the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*: "The development of the NT canon is an example of the development of dogma. Its history was locally vague and varied and not definitively completed until the Council of Trent." "Only in the 5th century did the Church come to a universal stabilization of the canon, and not until the Council of Trent did the canon receive its dogmatic definition." F. Schroeder, "Canon, Biblical," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 3, 2nd ed. (Farmington Hills, MI: Gale, 2003), 27, 28.

10. The Disputed Books

1. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.25.1–5.

2. Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 205.

3. For a more detailed look at the canonization process of Revelation, see Thomas J. Kraus and Michael Sommer, eds. *Book of Seven Seals: The Peculiarity of Revelation, its Manuscripts, Attestation, and Transmission* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 137–174.

4. See, for example, Origen, *On First Principles* 2.11.2; Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 7.24.1.

5. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.11–13.

6. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.28.2.

7. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament*, 105.

8. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 7.24.6. Apparently eschatology has a long history of dividing churches.

9. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 7.25.1–3.

10. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 7.25.4.

11. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 7.25.7.

12. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 7.25.9–27.

13. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.25.3.

14. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 4.16.2.

15. Compare 2 John 7 and Polycarp of Smyrna, *Epistle to the Philippians* 7.1.

16. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 1.16.3; 3.16.8.

17. See Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 4.26.3 for the possible allusion, though its actual relation to 3 John 9 seems tenuous at best.

18. Clement of Alexandria, *Comments on the Epistle of Jude.*

19. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Typho* 81. He writes, "We have perceived, moreover, that the expression, 'The day of the Lord is as a thousand years,' is connected with this subject."

20. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.14.1.

21. Origen, *Commentary on Romans* 4.8.

22. Origen, *Commentary on John* 20.10.66.

23. Charles E. Hill, *The Johannine Corpus in the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 471.

24. Tertullian, *On the Apparel of Women* 1.3.

25. Origen, *Homily on Joshua* 7.1.

26. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.3.1.

27. Michael J. Kruger, "The Authenticity of 2 Peter," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42, no. 4 (1999): 645.

28. Origen, *Commentary on John* 5.3.

29. Origen, *Homily on Joshua.* 7.1. He writes that "Peter cries out with trumpets in two of his epistles."

30. Kruger, "The Authenticity of 2 Peter," 649.

31. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.14.1.

32. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 5.23.2.

33. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 82.1.

34. Michael J. Kruger, *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 271.

35. Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 271–272.

36. Martin Luther, "Preface to Hebrews," in *Works of Martin Luther: Translated with Introductions and Notes*, vol. VI (Philadelphia: A. J. Holman Company and The Castle Press, 1932), 476.

37. Luther, "Preface to the New Testament," in *Works of Martin Luther,* 444.

38. Luther, "Preface to James and Jude," in *Works of Martin Luther,* 478.

39. Luther, "Preface to Revelation," in *Works of Martin Luther,* 488.

11. The Rejected Books

1. William Hone, ed, *The Lost Books of the Bible*, trans. Jeremiah Jones and William Wake (Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc., 2005).

2. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3.3.3.

3. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 4.17.

4. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.16.1.

5. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 4.23.11.

6. See Edmon L. Gallagher and John D. Meade, *The Biblical Canon Lists from Early Christianity: Texts and Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017),, 136–139.

7. Larry W. Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2006), 32–33.

8. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, 4.20.2.

9. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.8.7.

10. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 1.17; 2.1; 2.9.

11. Origen, *Commentary on Romans* 10.31.

12. Tertullian, *On Modesty* 10.

13. Tertullian, *On Modesty* 20.

14. Origen, *On First Principles* 4.11.

15. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Festal Letter* 39.7.

16. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.14.1.

17. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 2.20.

18. Origen, *Against Celsus* 63.1; *On First Principles* 3.2.4.

19. Tertullian, *On Modesty* 20.

20. Jerome, *On Illustrious Men* 6.

21. Clement of Alexandria, *Eclogae Propheticae* 41.

22. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.14.1.

23. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.3.2.

24. Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History* 7.19.

25. Jerome, *On Illustrious Men* 5.

26. Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 248.

27. More detailed overviews may be found in Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 122–126 and in David Brakke, *The Gnostics: Myth, Ritual, and Diversity in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 52–70, though both are written from a perspective generally hostile to orthodox Christianity. An ancient recounting of various Gnostic beliefs may be found in the first two books of Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*. For Gnostic writings that have detailed cosmologies, see the Apocryphon of John, the Gospel of the Egyptians, or the Hypostasis of the Archons.

28. For a helpful study in this regard, see Simon Gathercole, *The Gospel and the Gospels: Christian Proclamation and Early Jesus Books* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2022). Gathercole contends that there are four basic elements of the earliest apostolic preaching that may be used to adjudicate between the canonical and the non-canonical Gospels: 1) The proclamation of Jesus as Messiah; 2) Jesus' vicarious death; 3) Jesus' resurrection on the third day; and 4) The belief that all of this was a fulfillment of the Scriptures (pp. 36–44). Additionally, for the earliest Christians belief in Jesus as Lord arising in a context of exclusivist Jewish monotheism, see Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest* Christianity (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003).

29. Translation of the Gospel of Thomas by Thomas O. Lambdin in James M. Robinson, ed.,*The Nag Hammadi Library*, 3rd. ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 126–138.

30. Hippolytus of Rome, *Refutation of All Heresies* 5.2.

31. Origen, *Homilies on Luke,* Homily 1.2.

32. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.25.6.

33. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lecture* 6.31.

34. Translation of the Gospel of Judas in Bentley Layton and David Brakke, eds., *The Gnostic Scriptures*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021), 67–76.

35. Translation of the Gospel of Philip by Wesley W. Isenberg in *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 141–160.

36. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 1.20.1.

37. Translation of the Infancy Gospel of Thomas in J. K. Elliott, ed., *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford : New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 1993), 75–83.

38. The Quran reads here, "Then will Allah say: "O Jesus the son of Mary! Recount My favour to thee and to thy mother. Behold! I strengthened thee with the holy spirit, so that thou didst speak to the people in childhood and in maturty. Behold! I taught thee the Book and Wisdom, the Law and the Gospel and behold! thou makest out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, by My leave, and thou breathest into it and it becometh a bird by My leave." Translated by Abdullah Yusuf Ali. Available online at https://quranyusufali.com/.

39. Translation of the Apocryphon of John by Frederik Wisse in *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 105–123.

40. Translation of the Gospel of Peter in Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, 154–158.

41. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.12.3.

42. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.12.6.

43. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.25.6.

44. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3.11.8.

45. Origen, *Homilies on Luke,* Homily 1.2.

46. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.25.6–7.

47. Richard Dawkins, *Outgrowing God: A Beginner's Guide* (New York: Random House, 2019), 38.

48. Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 167.

49. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Michael J. Kruger, *The Heresy of Orthodoxy: How Contemporary Culture's Fascination with Diversity Has Reshaped Our Understanding of Early Christianity*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 58.

50. F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1988), 277-278.

12. Transmission and Textual Criticism

1. Thanks to Mark Ward for this word picture.

2. See these explained in more detail in Paul D. Wegner, *A Student's Guide to Textual Criticism of the Bible: Its History, Methods and Results* (Durham: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 44–50.

3. Did you see what I did there?

4. Daniel B. Wallace, "The Reliability of the New Testament Manuscripts," in *Understanding Scripture: An Overview of the Bible's Origin, Reliability, and Meaning*, eds. Wayne Grudem, C. John Collins, and Thomas R. Schreiner (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 115.

5. For some examples, see Emanuel Tov, T*extual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 259.

6. Cited in John D. Meade and Peter J. Gurry, *Scribes and Scripture: The Amazing Story of How We Got the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 93.

7. Text drawn from C. S. Lewis, T*he Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (HarperCollins Children's Books, 2015), 47–48.

8. For an overview of some examples, see Bruce M. Metzger, "The Practice of Textual Criticism Among the Church Fathers," in *New Testament Studies: Philological, Versional, and Patristic* (Leiden: Brill, 1980), 189–198.

9. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 5.30.1–2.

10. Origen, *Commentary on Matthew*, ser. 121.

11. Quoted in Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II-II, Q 158, A 1, ad 1.

12. Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God* 15.10–13.

13. Irenaeus of Lyons, A*gainst Heresies* 5.30.1–2. Square brackets original. The final clause is deemed to be potentially questionable as Eusebius does not preserve the statement in the Greek in *Ecclesiastical History* 5.8.5–6.

14. Metzger, "The Practice of Textual Criticism Among the Church Fathers," 190.

15. Metzger, "The Practice of Textual Criticism Among the Church Fathers," 191.

13. The Transmission of the Old Testament

1. Karen H. Jobes and Moisés Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 147.

2. Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 42–44.

3. Ellis R. Brotzman and Eric J. Tully, *Old Testament Textual Criticism: A Practical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 22.

4. Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 31. For detailed discussions of dating and of the scrolls, see James C. VanderKam, T*he Dead Sea Scrolls Today*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2010), 33–94.

5. Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 95.

6. Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 26.

7. Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 27.

8. Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 29.

9. Brotzman and Tully, *Old Testament Textual Criticism*, 41.

10. Brotzman and Tully, *Old Testament Textual Criticism*, 27.

11. Peter W. Flint, *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013), 66.

12. Paul D. Wegner, A *Student's Guide to Textual Criticism of the Bible: Its History, Methods and Results* (Durham: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 91.

13. Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 179.

14. See Brotzman and Tully, *Old Testament Textual Criticism*, 28–31 for an overview of textual theories.

15. A short overview of these editions can be found in Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 70–72.

16. Peter J. Gentry, "The Text of the Old Testament," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 52 (2009): 24.

17. See Jobes and Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, 58–63 for an overview of manuscripts.

18. See a description of the translation approaches in Gregory R. Lanier and William A. Ross, *The Septuagint: What It Is and Why It Matters* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 59–79.

19. For the relation of translation methodology to textual criticism, see Jobes and Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, 114–117.

20. See the discussion of terminology in Lanier and Ross, *The Septuagint*, 31–36.

21. Other variations are discussed in Lanier and Ross, *The Septuagint*, 111–117.

22. Flint, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 64.

23. Origen, O*rigen to Africanus* 5.

24. Flint, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 44.

25. Gentry, "The Text of the Old Testament," 24.

26. VanderKam, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today*, 51.

27. See an overview of the Targums in Wegner, *A Student's Guide to Textual Criticism*, 172–175 and in Brotzman and Tully, *Old Testament Textual Criticism*, 76–82.

28. See Brotzman and Tully, *Old Testament Textual Criticism*, 82–85 for an overview of the Peshitta.

29. Brotzman and Tully, *Old Testament Textual Criticism*, 87.

30. For multiple examples, see Lanier and Ross, *The Septuagint*, 147–160.

31. The LXX is my translation and intentionally aligns the English with the ESV to make the correspondence clearer.

14. The Transmission of the New Testament

1. Bart D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (New York: HarperOne, 2005), 10.

2. Ehrman's statements present a striking parallel to this King James Only argument from Edward Hills: "But if the providential preservation of the Scriptures is not important, why is the infallible inspiration of the original

Scriptures important? If God has not preserved the Scriptures by His special providence, why would He have infallibly inspired them in the first place? And if it is not important that the Scriptures be regarded as infallibly inspired, why is it important to insist that Gospel is completely true? And if this is not important, why is it important to believe that Jesus is the divine Son of God?" Edward F. Hills, *The King James Version Defended*, 4th ed. (Des Moines, IA: Christian Research Press, 1984), 225.

3. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, 71.

4. Zachary J. Cole, "Myths About Copyists," in *Myths and Mistakes in New Testament Textual Criticism*, eds. Elijah Hixson and Peter J. Gurry (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), 137. See the full overview from 137–144.

5. Cole, "Myths About Copyists," 139–140.

6. For a detailed discussion of the Christian preference for the codex and of the nomina sacra, see Larry W. Hurtado, T*he Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2006), 43–134.

7. Polycarp of Smyrna, *Epistle to the Philippians* 13.1.

8. Martyrdom of Polycarp 20.1.

9. Martyrdom of Polycarp 22.2–3

10. Harry Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 112.

11. For a*n overview of writing materials, see Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission,Corruption, and Restoration*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 4–10.

12. These and others notes are found in Metzger and Ehrman, T*he Text of the New Testament*, 29–33. See also Bruce M. Metzger, *Manuscripts of the Greek Bible: An Introduction to Palaeography* (Cary: Oxford University Press, 1981), 20.

13. Metzger, *Manuscripts of the Greek Bible*, 76.

14. Metzger and Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament*, 26.

15. An oft repeated statement. It appears to have originated with Eldon Jay Epp, "Textual Criticism," in T*he New Testament and Its Modern Interpreters*, eds. Eldon Jay Epp and George W. MacRae (Philadephlia, PA: Fortress Press, 1989), 91.

16. For a good overview of accurate assessment of the numbers, see Jacob W. Peterson, "Math Myths," in *Myths and Mistakes*, 48–69.

17. D. C. Parker, *An Introduction to the New Testament Manuscripts and Their Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 317.

18. Paul D. Wegner, *A Student's Guide to Textual Criticism of the Bible: Its History, Methods and Results* (Durham: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 232. The Institut für neutestamentliche Textforschung (INTF) presently lists 325 manuscripts of Revelation (with several duplicates) as of January 14, 2025. Updated numbers drawn from https://ntvmr.uni-muenster.de/liste.

19. 4th century: Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus. 5th century: Codex Alexandrinus and Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus.

20. Based on my count as of January 14, 2025 from the *Liste* at https://ntvmr.uni-muenster.de/liste. The numbers in Figure 14.2 are drawn from the same search. Also see Peterson, "Math Myths," 63.

21. Peterson, "Math Myths," 67–68.

22. Peter J. Gurry, "The Number of Variants in the Greek New Testament: A Proposed Estimate," *New Testament Studies* 62, no. 1 (2016): 97–121.

23. Norman L. Geisler, B*aker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 532.

24. Neil R. Lightfoot, *How We Got the Bible*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: BakerBooks, 2003), 96. The first edition was published in 1963, and so has been spread for many years.

25. For an overview of the versions, see Metzger and Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament*, 94–126.

26. Metzger and Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament*, 106.

27. Metzger and Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament*, 126.

28. Metzger and Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament*, 276–277.

29. Gregory R. Lanier, "Dating Myths, Part Two," in *Myths and Mistakes*, 115–116.

30. Desiderius Erasmus, "Epistle 694: To Willibald Pirckheimer" in *The Correspondence of Erasmus: Letters 594 - 841: 1517–1518*, ed. Peter G. Bietenholz, trans. R. A. B. Mynors and D. F. S. Thomson, vol. 5, *Collected Works of Erasmus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 167.

31. The preceding overview is drawn from Martin Heide, "Erasmus and the Search for the Original Text of the New Testament," *Text and Canon Institute*, Feb 7, 2023, https://textandcanon.org/erasmus-and-the-search-for-the-original-text-of-the-new-testament/.

32. For more on the development of the Textus Receptus, see Metzger and Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament*, 137–152.

33. See Mark Ward, "Which Textus Receptus? A Critique of Confessional Bibliology," *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 25, no. 1 (2020): 51–77.

34. Metzger and Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament*, 155.

35. For a broader overview, see Metzger and Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament*, 152–170.

36. See this story retold and in Tischendorf's own words in Stanley E. Porter, *Constantine Tischendorf: The Life and Work of a 19th Century Bible Hunter* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

37. Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament: An Introduction to the Critical Editions and to the Theory and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism*, trans. Errol F. Rhodes (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1987), 11–14.

38. This history drawn from Aland and Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, 19–36 and "The Novum Testamentum Graece (Nestle-Aland) and its history," https://www.academic-bible.com/en/bible-society-and-biblical-studies/scholarly-editions/greek-new-testament/nestle-aland/.

39. Fifteen verses are typically omitted in full from modern critical text Bible translations: Matt. 17:21; Matt. 18:11; Matt. 23:14; Mark 7:16; Mark 9:44; Mark 9:46; Mark 11:26; Mark 15:28; Luke 17:36; John 5:4; Acts 8:37; Acts 15:34; Acts 24:7; Acts 28:29; Romans 16:24.

40. Hills, *The King James Version Defended*, 231.

41. Hills, *The King James Version Defended*, 230.

42. Bruce M. Metzger, *The Bible in Translation: Ancient and English Versions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 77.

43. Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 5th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 21.

44. Ehrman, *The New Testament*, 26.

45. Ehrman, *The New Testament*, 28.

46. Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 219.

47. Bart D. Ehrman, T*he Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

48. Epp, "Textual Criticism," 91

49. Epp, "Textual Criticism," 92.

50. Aland and Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, 69.

51. Aland and Aland, *The Text of the New Testament,* 70.

52. Aland and Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, 289.

53. For Wallace's breakdown, see Daniel B. Wallace, "The Reliability of the New Testament Manuscripts," in *Understanding Scripture: An Overview of the Bible's Origin, Reliability, and Meaning*, eds. Wayne Grudem, C. John Collins, and Thomas R. Schreiner (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 114–117. For a similar presentation, also see Daniel B. Wallace, "How Badly Did the Scribes Corrupt the New Testament Text?" in *Revisiting the Corruption of the New Testament: Manuscript, Patristic, and Apocryphal Evidence*, ed. Daniel B. Wallace (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2011), 40–43.

54. Wallace, "The Reliability of the New Testament Manuscripts," 117.

15. How Textual Variation Impacts Us Today

1. For a discussion that touches upon Deuteronomy 32:43, though its primary focus is 32:8, see Michael Heiser, "Deuteronomy 32:8 and the Sons of God," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158 (2001): 52–74.

2. My translation.

3. Erasmus commented in his *Annotations*, "However—lest I should keep anything hidden—there has been found in England one single Greek manuscript in which occurs what is lacking in the commonly-accepted texts. It is written as follows, *For there are three who bear witness in heaven: The Father, the Word, and the Spirit, and these three are one. And there are three which bear witness on the earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood. If the testimony of men,* etc, although I think it is no accident that the phrase 'and these three are unto one,' which found in our Greek manuscripts, is not repeated at this point. I therefore restored from the British codex what was said to be lacking in our edition, lest anyone should have any handle to blame me unjustly. However, I suspect that this codex was adapted to agree with the manuscripts of the Latins." Desiderius Erasmus, *In Novum Testamentum ab eodem tertio recognitum, Annatationes item ab ipso recognitae, & auctario neutique poenitendo locupletetae* (Basel: Froben, 1522), 617–618. The Latin translation is from Grantley McDonald, "The Johannine Comma from Erasmus to Westminster," in *Scriptural Authority and Biblical Criticism in the Dutch Golden Age: God's Word Questioned*, eds. Dirk van Miert, Henk Nellen, Piet Steenbakkers, and Jetze Touber (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 64–65. I have translated the Greek for clarity.

4. See discussion in Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 102–106.

5. Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 187–189.

6. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.16.

7. Ambrose of Milan, *On the Holy Spirit* 3.3.15.

8. Jerome, *Against the Pelagians* 2.17.

9. Augustine of Hippo, *Tractate 33 (John 7:40-8:11).*

10. Bart D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (New York: HarperOne, 2005), 7.

11. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, 11.

12. Desiderius Erasmus, "The *Apologia* of Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam," trans. John M. Ross, in *The New Testament Scholarship of Erasmus: An Introduction with Erasmus' Prefaces and Ancillary Writings*, ed. Robert D. Sider, vol. 31, *Collected Works of Erasmus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019), 462.

13. Erasmus, "*Apologia*," 464–465.

14. Erasmus, "*Apologia*," 467–468.

15. Erasmus, "*Apologia*," 467.

16. How Bible Translation Works

1. Brian Simmons makes these basic claims regarding his approach to The Passion Translation, saying "Aramaic and Hebrew are related linguistically, and both are considered to be passionate and poetic. Greek speaks to the mind while Aramaic-Hebrew speaks powerfully to the heart." Beth Patch, "Revealing the Heart of God in 'The Passion Translation,'" CBN 12/10/2022, https://www2.cbn.com/article/bible-says/revealing-heart-god-passion-translation.

2. Preface to the *Holy Bible, Amplified Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987). Emphasis added.

3. It is not unheard of for this interpretation to actually be put forward.

4. For numerous examples, see Dave Brunn, *One Bible Many Versions: Are All Translations Created Equal?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 23–33, 52–54.

5. Brunn, *One Bible Many Versions*, 65–68.

6. Jerome, *Preface to the Four Gospels.*

7. Glen G. Scorgie, "Introduction and Overview," in *The Challenge of Bible Translation: Communicating God's Word to the World*, eds. Glen G. Scorgie, Mark L. Strauss, and Steven M. Voth (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 21.

8. Robert Alter, *The Art of Bible Translation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), ix.

9. Alter, *The Art of Bible Translation*, 69.

10. Yes, I know that it would need to be "*whom* the food ate" to be proper English, but *whom* is falling out of common usage in colloquial English.

11. Arabic is the only language I am personally aware of that has a near equivalent to English's question "do," but that only exists for questions in Modern Standard Arabic, not in regional dialects.

12. There is in fact no pronoun in Hebrew; it is only the Hebrew verb conjugated for third person masculine singular. English must supply the pronoun since our verb conjugations don't communicate the subject.

13. For a description of the outbreak of the controversy, see D. A. Carson, *The Inclusive-Language Debate: A Plea for Realism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 26–37.

14. For a sampling of some of the debates, see D. A. Carson, "The Limits of Functional Equivalence in Bible Translation—and Others Limits, Too," in *The Challenge of Bible Translation*, 78–91; Mark L. Strauss, "Current Issues in the Gender-Language Debate: A Response to Vern Poythress and Wayne Grudem" in *The Challenge of Bible Translation*, 115–127; Mark L. Strauss, *Distorting Scripture? The Challenge of Bible Translation and Gender Accuracy* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998); Vern Poythress, "Searching Instead for an Agenda-Neutral Bible," *World* (21 November 1998): 24– 25; Vern S. Poythress and Wayne A. Grudem, *The Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy: Muting the Masculinity of God's Words* (B&H Publishing, 2000).

15. Norman L Geisler and William E. Nix, *From God to Us Revised and Expanded: How We Got Our Bible* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2012), ch. 21. eBook.

16. *The Development and Use of Gender Language in Contemporary English — A Corpus Linguistic Analysis*, prepared by Collins Dictionaries, 2010. https://s45600.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/The-Development-and-Use-of-Gender-Language-in-Contemporary-English-Collins-Report.pdf.

17. See examples from the ESV, NASB, HCSB, and KJV, along with the following discussion in Brunn, *One Bible Many Versions*, 174–179.

18. See Exodus 1 for multiple examples.

19. Carson, *The Inclusive-Language Debate*, 19.

20. The text of 1 John 3:17 in the Greek script is ὃς δ' ἂν ἔχῃ τὸν βίον τοῦ κόσμου καὶ θεωρῇ τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ χρείαν ἔχοντα καὶ κλείσῃ τὰ σπλάγχνα αὐτοῦ ἀπ' αὐτοῦ, πῶς ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ μένει ἐν αὐτῷ.

21. Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., rev. and ed. Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 176–177.

22. Bart D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (New York: HarperOne, 2005), 7.

23. "Preface to the Authorised (King James) Version," in Gerald Bray, *Translating the Bible: From William Tyndale to King James* (London: The Latimer Trust, 2010), 222.

24. This is the logic of the KJV translators: "As the king's speech which he uttered in parliament, being translated into French, Dutch, Italian and Latin, is still the kings speech, though it be not interpreted by every translator with the like grace, nor peradventure so fitly for phrase, nor so expressly for sense, everywhere." "Preface to the Authorised (King James) Version," in Bray, *Translating the Bible*, 222.

25. There is a helpful analogy regarding the derivative authority of the LXX. See Gregory R. Lanier and William A. Ross, *The Septuagint: What It Is and Why It Matters* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 178–181.

17. Differences in English Bible Translations

1. For more discussion of false friends in the KJV, see Mark Ward, *Authorized: The Use and Misuse of the King James Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 31–49. I drew this example from 41–42.

2. Oddly enough, the NLT includes a footnote with an alternate rendering of "For God loved the world *so much* that he gave" (my emphasis).

3. "Translation Philosophy," *The Passion Translation*, accessed 2/24/2025, https://www.thepassiontranslation.com/translation-philosophy/.

18. Early English Bible Translations

1. See F. F. Bruce, *History of the Bible in English: From the Earliest Versions*, 3rd ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1978), 5–11. A much fuller accounting of these early translations is found in David Daniell, *The Bible in English: Its History and Influence* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 37–65.

2. As far as I can tell, the oft-quoted statement of Wycliffe's that "Holy Scripture is the preeminent authority for every Christian, and the rule of faith and of all human perfection" does not truly derive from him. It appears that it is rather a summary statement of Rudolf Buddenseig, in his introduction to the critical edition of *De Veritate Sacrae Scripturae*: "His new unheard-of assertion: Scriptura sacra est precipua autoritas cuilibet cristiano et regula fidei et tocius perfeccionis humane, is, as far as I see, the gist of his investigations." John Wyclif, *De Veritate Sacrae Scripturae: Now First Edited from the Manuscripts with Critical and Historical Notes*, vol. 1., ed. Rudolf Buddensieg (London: Trübner & Co., 1905), xxv. This quotation is one of the most repeated statements from Wycliffe (I very nearly used it myself to summarize Wycliffe's doctrine of Scripture), but it appears to be synthetic and the result of a misunderstanding of Buddenseig's summary. Probably the most popular source for the quotation is "Why Wycliffe Translated the Bible Into English," *Christian History* 3 (1983): 26.

3. John Wyclif, *On the Truth of Holy Scripture*, trans. Ian Christopher Levy (Kalamazoo, MI: Western Michigan University, 2001), 200.

4. Wyclif, *On the Truth of Holy Scripture*, 212.

5. John Wyclif, *On the Pastoral Office* 2.2a*, in Advocates of Reform: From Wyclif to Erasmus*, ed. Matthew Spinka, vol. XIV, The Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953). 49–51.

6. Quote attributed to Henry Knighton. Cited in Alister McGrath, *In the Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible and How It Changed a Nation, a Language, and a Culture* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 20.

7. "Prohibition of English Translations of the Bible from the Time of Wyclif Unless Authorized by a Bishop or a Provincial Council," in *Records of the English Bible: The Documents Relating to the Translation and Publication of the Bible in English, 1525–1611*, ed. Alfred W. Pollard (London: Oxford University Press, 1911), 80–81.

8. Those others being Latin, Greek, German, French, Hebrew, Spanish, and Italian. David Daniell, *William Tyndale: A Biography* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1994), 18. Daniell's biography of Tyndale is an excellent resource for both the life of Tyndale and his translation work.

9. Bobrick Benson, *Wide as the Waters: The Story of the English Bible and the Revolution It Inspired* (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2002), 80.

10. John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (London: Day, 1563), 514. Spelling modernized.

11. "Tyndale's Preface to the Pentateuch, 1530," in Gerald Bray, *Translating the Bible: From William Tyndale to King James* (London: The Latimer Trust, 2010), 51. Bray is an excellent resource as he provides prefaces to all of the early English Bible translations in a single volume.

12. Bruce, *History of the Bible in English*, 41.

13. Thomas More, Book 4 of *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer*, in *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More,* vol. 8, part 1, ed. Louis A. Schuster, Richard C. Marius, James P. Lusardi, and Richard J. Schoeck (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1973), 358. Spelling modernized.

14. David Teems, *Tyndale: The Man Who Gave God an English Voice* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2012), xx. See also Benson, W*ide as the Waters*, 258.

15. For the 80% estimate, see John Nielson and Royal Skousen, "How Much of the King James Bible Is William Tyndale's? An Estimation Based on a Sampling," *Reformation* 3, no. 1 (1998): 49–74. For detailed discussions of Tyndale's translation work as a whole, see Daniell, *William Tyndale*, 134–142, 302–332.

16. J. I. Mombert, *William Tyndale's Five Books of Moses Called the Pentateuch: Being a Verbatim Reprint of the Edition of M.CCCCC.XXX* (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph & Co, 1884), li. The original Latin is also printed alongside the English translation.

17. Mombert, *William Tyndale's Five Books of Moses*, li–lii.

18. "Coverdale's Dedication and Preface to the Bible, 1535," in Bray, *Translating the Bible*, 67–68.

19. For more samplings of Coverdale's memorable words and phrases, see Bruce, *History of the Bible in English*, 62–63 and Gordon Campbell, *Bible: The Story of the King James Version 1611–2011* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 16–17.

20. H. W. Hoare, E*volution of the English Bible: A Historical Sketch of the Successive Versions From 1382 to 1885*, 2nd ed. (London: John Murray, 1902), 186.

21. Bruce, *History of the Bible in English*, 65.

22. Bruce, *History of the Bible in English*, 70.

23. Bruce, *History of the Bible in English*, 78–80.

24. Benson, *Wide as the Waters*, 175.

25. Bruce, *History of the Bible in English*, 94.

26. Bruce, *History of the Bible in English*, 94.

27. Council of Trent, Session 4, "Concerning the Edition and Use of the Sacred Books, 8 April, 1546," in C*anons and Decrees of the Council of Trent: Original Text with English Translation*, trans. H. J. Schroeder (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book Co., 1960), 18.

28. "Preface to the Reims New Testament, 1582," in Bray, *Translating the Bible*, 178.

29. For some examples, see Benson, *Wide as the Waters,* 192–193.

30. McGrath, *In the Beginning*, 162.

31. The text of all fifteen rules may be found in Pollard, *Records of the English Bible*, 53–55.

32. Campbell, *Bible*, 55.

33. "Preface to the Authorised (King James) Version, 1611," in Bray, *Translating the Bible*, 228. A modernized version of the preface may be found in Joshua Barzon, *The Forgotten Preface: Surprising Insights on the Translation Philosophy of the King James Translators* (Joshua Barzon, 2022), 59–95.

34. "Preface to the Authorised (King James) Version," in Bray, *Translating the Bible*, 230–231.

35. "Preface to the Authorised (King James) Version," in Bray, *Translating the Bible*, 231.

36. "Preface to the Authorised (King James) Version," in Bray, *Translating the Bible*, 232.

37. Preface to the Authorised (King James) Version," in Bray, *Translating the Bible*, 234.

38. McGrath, *In the Beginning*, 269.

39. Bruce M. Metzger, *The Bible in Translation: Ancient and English Versions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 76–77.

40. McGrath, *In the Beginning*, 278.

41. Adam Nicolson, G*od's Secretaries: The Making of the King James Bible* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 228–229.

42. McGrath, *In the Beginning*, 289.

43. For a comprehensive accounting of the various editions of the KJV, see David Norton, A *Textual History of the King James Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 46–127.

44. Campbell, *Bible*, 136.

19. Modern English Bible Translations

1. Bruce M. Metzger, *The Bible in Translation: Ancient and English Versions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 82.

2. For different parts of these histories, see Metzger, *The Bible in Translation*, 81–98 and F. F. Bruce, *History of the Bible in English: From the Earliest Versions*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 127–134.

3. William Temple Franklin, ed., *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Benjamin Franklin*, vol 5, 2nd ed. (London: Henry Colburn, 1819), 219.

4. Preface to *The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments in the Common Version with Amendments of the Language by Noah Webster* (New Haven: Durrie and Peck, 1833), iii.

5. Bruce, *History of the Bible in English*, 135.

6. For all eight principles, see Bruce, *History of the Bible in English*, 137.

7. Example drawn from Alister McGrath, *In the Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible and How It Changed a Nation, a Language, and a Culture* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 194–195.

8. Gordon Campbell, *Bible: The Story of the King James Version 1611–2011* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 223.

9. Charles Spurgeon, "Notes," in *The Sword and Trowel: A Record of Combat with Sin and of Labour for the Lord*, ed. Charles Spurgeon (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1881), 418.

10. William John Burgon, *The Revision Revised* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc: reprint 1971), vi–vii. Emphasis original.

11. Burgon, *The Revision Revised*, 16.

12. For example, see D. A. Waite, *Defending the King James Bible: A Fourfold Superiority: God's Words Kept Intact in English*, 3rd ed. (Collingswood: The Bible for Today Press, 2006).

13. See Augustine's initial report in *Letters of St. Augustine* 71.3.5, Jerome's response in 75.7.22, and Augustine's follow-up in 82.5.35.

14. This is in fact a perfectly acceptable rendering of the Hebrew *'almah* as found in the MT. It is a generic term for a young maiden and could imply virgin but is not necessarily that specific; the LXX, which Matthew quotes, translated *'almah* by the more definite term of *parthenos*, which is quite specifically "virgin." In this sense, the RSV simply followed the Hebrew more than the

Greek, and often on the basis of this passage, has been remembered as a more "liberal" translation.

15. For an overview of the criticism, see Bruce, *History of the Bible in English*, 194–200. For more detail, see Peter J. Thuesen, *In Discordance with the Scriptures: American Protestant Battles over Translating the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 199), 93–119.

16. Foreword to the *New American Standard Bible* (La Habra, CA: Lockman Foundation, 1995).

17. Foreword to the NASB.

18. A full history of the NIV can be found in Burton L. Goddard, *The NIV Story: The Inside Story of the New International Version* (New York: Vantage Press, 1989). A condensed version can be found in John H. Stek, "The New International Version: How It Came to Be," in *The Challenge of Bible Translation: Communicating God's Word to the World*, eds. Glen G. Scorgie, Mark L. Strauss, and Steven M. Voth (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 235–263.

19. Preface to *The Holy Bible, New International Version* (Colorado Springs: International Bible Society, 1984).

20. You may learn more about the production of the NIV in Kenneth L. Barker, ed., *The Making of the NIV* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1991).

21. The Colorado Springs Guidelines can be found Wayne Grudem, *What's Wrong with Gender-Neutral Bible Translations?* (Libertyville, IL: Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, 1997), 28–31. The haste with which the document was drawn up and its resulting weaknesses have been criticized, as in D. A. Carson, *The Inclusive-Language Debate: A Plea for Realism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 111–133. Carson also provides an overview of the controversy in *The Inclusive-Language Debate*, 19–38.

22. One of the reactions may be found in Vern S. Poythress and Wayne A. Grudem, *The TNIV and the Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2004).

23. See an overview of the controversy in Mark L. Strauss, *40 Questions About Bible Translation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2023), 153–158.

24. Arthur L. Farstad, *The New King James Version: In the Great Tradition*, 2nd ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1993), 1, 31.

25. Farstad, *The New King James*, 33–34.

26. For example, the following verses reflect different translation (or perhaps even textual) choices rather than a mere language update: Isa. 44:8; 1 Cor. 14:20; 1 John 5:19.

27. Bruce M. Metzger, Robert C. Dentan, and Walter Harrelson, *The Making of the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), 6–8.

28. Metzger, Dentan, and Harrelson, *The Making of the New Revised Standard Version*, 9–11.

29. Preface to the *New Revised Standard Version Bible* (New York: American Bible Society, 1989).

30. Preface to the NRSV. The question of inclusive language in the NRSV is dealt with more extensively in Metzger, Dentan, and Harrelson, *The Making of the New Revised Standard Version*, 73–84.

31. "A Note to the Readers," *Holy Bible, New Living Translation* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1996).

32. "Introduction to the New Living Translation."

33. NET Bible Preface, available online at https://netbible.com/preface/.

34. History adapted from "The History of the ESV," *Crossway*, October 8, 2021, https://www.crossway.org/articles/the-history-of-the-esv/.

35. You can find a case made for essentially literal translation by several members of the ESV Translation Oversight Committee in Wayne Grudem et al, *Translating Truth: The Case for Essentially Literal Bible Translation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005). See also Leland Ryken, *The ESV and the English Bible Legacy* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011).

36. Vern Poythress, "The English Standard Version: An Explanation," *The Works of John Frame & Vern Poythress*, May 21, 2012, https://frame-poythress.org/the-english-standard-version-an-explanation/. Poythress is part of the ESV Translation Oversight Committee.

37. See the preface to the ESV for more details.

38. Thom S. Rainer, "Major Shift in the Top Ten Best-Selling Bible Translations the Past Year," *Church Answers*, March 28, 2022, https://churchanswers.com/blog/major-shift-in-the-top-ten-best-selling-bible-translations-the-past-year/.

39. Mark L. Strauss, "A Review of the Christian Standard Bible," *Themelios* 44 no. 2 (2019). https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/article/a-review-of-the-christian-standard-bible/.

40. Preface to the *Holy Bible, Berean Standard Bible* (Pittsburgh, PA: Bible Hub, 2022).

41. On the topic of Bible translations and how copyright restricts them from being freely shared, see the following two articles: Maurice A. Robinson, "The Bondage of the Word: Copyright and the Bible," November 20, 1996, republished at https://sellingjesus.org/articles/copyright-and-the-bible; Jon Here, "Bible Publishers - Stewards or Gatekeepers?" *Selling Jesus*, October 23, 2023, https://sellingjesus.org/articles/bible-publishers. For real-world examples of how copyright restricts God's Word outside the United States, see Tim Jore, *The Christian Commons: Ending the Spiritual Famine of the Global Church*, 2nd ed. (Tim Jore, 2015), 160–186.

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How did we come to have the Bible as we know it today? How can it be called the Word of God when men wrote it? Are there lost books of the Bible? Why are there verses missing in my Bible? Why do Bible translations differ from one another?

Many questions could be asked about the history of the Bible. The story of how we came to have the Bible is a fascinating story, yet it is also a tale often mired in misinformation, sensationalism, and confusion—especially on the internet and in popular media sources. This book aims to clear away some of the confusion and to equip believers to better understand how it is that they have come to have the Bible. Within these pages, you will learn what we can know about the authors of Scripture; how the canon was formed and why we have the books that we have in our Bible; how the Bible was copied down through the centuries; and ultimately how it was translated into English so that we can read it in our own language. Written to function as both an introduction to the subject and as a reference resource, come embark on the marvelous journey that is the story of how we came to have the Bible as we know it today.

Matthew J. D. Mangum (MA, Reformed Theological Seminary) is a writer who seeks to develop freely available resources that may serve to equip the church. He is married to Miranda and has six children.

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